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NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

THE TAXICAB RIDDLE

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The detective's car shot ahead at frightful speed. Passing the other car, Nick turned directly in front of it and then deliberately slowed down.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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THE TAXICAB RIDDLE;

OR,

Nick Carter's Second Assistant.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERY IS BORN.

A gentleman stood upon the steps at the entrance to the old Mammoth House in Broadway, near the post office. He was smoking a huge black cigar in a leisurely manner, and seemed to be enjoying it hugely. He had the appearance and the demeanor of one who hasn't an important care in the world, for he turned his head from side to side, glancing idly up and down the famous thoroughfare, and at the people who passed him where he stood.

Suddenly his form stiffened. He shut his teeth tightly together so that the cigar between his jaws was almost severed in twain. A suggestion of pallor swept across his features. His whole attitude was tense, restrained, watchful, and plainly disturbed.

The cause of this sudden change in the man would have been at once apparent to a person watching him, had there been such a one.

A taxicab had drawn up before the entrance to the hotel, and a woman, tastefully and expensively gowned, had stepped down from it to the pavement. As the rigidity of the man who was watching her somewhat relaxed after that first sight of her, she turned her back toward him while she paid the driver of the cab.

Whatever the cause of the man's perturbation at the woman's appearance there, he made no effort to avoid her, but remained where he was, relaxing again into his former attitude of careless ease. Evidently, although he had appeared to recognize the woman instantly, he had no fear of recognition by her.

Having paid her cab hire, she turned around and calmly entered the hotel by the main entrance, ignoring the fact, if, indeed, she was aware of it, that just around the corner in Vesey Street, there is an entrance provided for women.

As she turned to the left, inside the swinging doors, and ascended the stairs to the office floor of the famous old hostelry, the man tossed his cigar into the street and followed her. He saw her enter the parlor at the Vesey Street end of the corridor, where she seated herself near one of the windows, while he deposited his bulk—for he was a big man—upon a chair at the opposite end of the room, facing her.

Presently, in rather a surreptitious manner, he took a bundle of papers and letters from one of his pockets, and, after selecting an envelope from among them, drew therefrom a photograph which he took care to conceal from the view of others. He began, alternately, to compare the pictured face upon the card with the features of the woman who had so excited his interest.

After a little he restored the photograph to its en-

velope and returned the bundle of letters and papers to his pocket, giving an emphatic nod of his head, as if he were entirely satisfied with the scrutiny.

He remained where he was a while longer, furtively studying the woman; and while he did so, a second woman entered the parlor, and, after a hasty glance around, crossed quickly to that other woman who had so strangely interested the man.

He could see that the second woman at once addressed the first one, and the reply was given, although he could not hear a word of what was said. He noticed, not without surprise, that no greetings were exchanged between them; at least, not such greeting as one would expect to see, given and received between two women who met under such circumstances.

The woman who had first attracted his notice, and whose likeness it was quite evident, he, by some strange chance, carried in his pocket, leaned back in her chair after the second woman addressed her, and appeared to be listening to what the newcomer had to say. She listened with the air of one who does not half believe —of one who feels nothing but scorn and contempt for the narrator.

Nor did she speak again, after the first few utterances she made, until the interview was apparently at an end. When she did speak again, she left her chair, at the same time opening a small hand bag she carried.

The man who was watching saw her take therefrom, an envelope, and pass it to the other woman. He saw her lips move as she did so, but he could not read the words she uttered; but he did notice the eagerness with which the second woman seized upon the envelope, and the celerity with which she concealed it.

When the second woman had the envelope in her possession, she turned about abruptly, and without a word of farewell, or so much as a gesture, went swiftly through the doorway and along the corridor toward the Vesey Street entrance.

For a moment it looked as if the first woman would spring out after the other one who had departed so suddenly; but, if she had the impulse to do so, she controlled it.

She did another thing which was no less astonishing to the man who was observing her, than the other incidents of that strange interview had been.

She stepped quickly to the window nearest her—one that fronted on Vesey Street—and, standing directly in front of it, she raised her hands and executed a series of wig-wag signals, performing them as deftly and rapidly as any officer of the United States Navy might have done.

A moment later she turned away from the window, and then the man who had been observing her so closely, stepped quickly forward toward her, confronting her halfway the length of the parlor.

"Madam Savage, unless I am greatly mistaken?" he said, in a low tone, and with just a suggestion of an interrogation at the close of his remark.

The woman had been on her way toward the door, evidently with the intention of departing from the hotel by the same route she had entered it; but she came to an abrupt halt when the stranger addressed her, and raised her eyes to his, calmly enough, and yet with a quick narrowing of her eyes. She replied quietly, and with the same low tone that the man had used.

"Yes," she said; and waited for him to proceed.

He smiled at her, and there seemed to be something in that smile that won her confidence; at least, while he spoke the next sentence, she returned the smile.

"Pardon me for addressing you in this public place," he said, "but the fact is, that my only purpose in this city was to find you, and to deliver to you a message which I have brought from the far West. I arrived this morning at six o'clock, believing that I might have some difficulty in finding you; and strangely enough, at ten o'clock, you drove to the door of this very hotel in a taxicab, and entered it."

"And you recognized me at once?" she inquired.

"Madam, the person who gave me the message to deliver to you also supplied me with a photograph of you," he replied. "When you left the cab I was instantly impressed by the likeness you bear to the picture in my possession. I followed you to this parlor, and here I found opportunity to make comparison. It convinced me. Will you be seated, madam?"

"No. Not here. Tell me, first, whose messenger you are."

"Can you not guess?"

"It is not for me to guess; it is for you to state, sir."

"Very true. The person—the man who sent me on this errand to you, is Tom Savage, your son."

"Thank you. Naturally I did suppose that much, when you told me that you had a message for me from the far West. Is the message a written one, or is it verbal?"

"Both, madam. I was to deliver the verbal one first; then the written one if you felt inclined to receive it; but on no account was I to force it upon you. I hope I am sufficiently explicit?"

"Quite so."

"Will you be seated now, madam?"

"No. When I paid the driver of the taxi, I told him that I should not be here long, and if he cared to remain in evidence he might drive me back again. More than likely he is still at the door. If you care to drive uptown with me, you can deliver your message on the way; or you may call upon me later in the day, as you prefer."

"You are very kind. I will accompany you," the man replied.

The taxicab was waiting. They entered it together and were driven away. At the moment when that cab started away from the front entrance to the old Mammoth House, was born a mystery which Nick Carter was soon to rate among the most profound of his varied experiences.

It was an accident, or a coincidence—whichever one may be pleased to call it—that Patsy, Nick Carter's second assistant, happened to be standing at the opposite end of the hotel steps, while the gentleman referred to was smoking his cigar at the Broadway entrance.

The man had already attracted the notice of Patsy, because of his care-free demeanor, his unmistakably handsome features, and clear, steadfast eyes; his tall, athletic figure, and the assured air of the West that clung to him.

Patsy noticed the man's start of surprise when Madam Savage left the taxi—for Madam Savage was not unknown to the young detective,* although his business at the hotel bore no relation to her visit there. But Madam Savage had been a client of Nick Carter's in the past; and once a client, always a friend, where Nick Carter was concerned.

It was because Patsy had noticed the interest taken in the arrival of Madam Savage, by the handsome stranger, that he followed the latter into the hotel parlor in pursuit of Madam Savage.

Patsy took a seat near the table in the middle of the room, and appeared to occupy himself with a newspaper. In reality he was watching all that took place—and was no less surprised than the stranger, by the character of the interview between the two women.

He could overhear no word of it, however; but he did see the stranger examining alternately, the photograph and the features of Madam Savage. Fate had led him to a seat where he overheard all that was said between the woman and the stranger, when the latter spoke to her as she was about to leave the room.

The young detective smiled to himself when he discovered what the man's interest in madam really was—merely that of a messenger from her son, somewhere in the West. He had never been told that Madam Savage had a son—a beautiful daughter, Irene by name, was the only offspring of madam's he had heard about—but she might have had a dozen sons, for all Patsy knew or cared.

Nevertheless, he sauntered along the corridor after them when they took their departure in company, and he saw them enter the taxi and drive away. Then he turned downtown to keep an eleven-o'clock engagement he had made, in Wall Street.

He thought no more about the episode at the hotel, until he reached home at four o'clock in the afternoon to find his chief, Nick Carter, in close consultation with Chick; and both were sufficiently grave to arouse his immediate interest.

"Sit down, Patsy," said his chief. "A most unfortunate thing has happened, to-day; one which affects me personally, as well as professionally, for I have always felt great respect and admiration for Madam Savage. She——"

"Whom did you say?" exclaimed Patsy.

"Madam Savage, lad. She was found dead, in a taxicab, shortly before one o'clock to-day. She was murdered, Patsy. She had been stabbed through the heart by an unknown man who was her companion in the cab."

*See No. 713, "A Slick Article; or, The Cleverest Rogue in New York."

CHAPTER II.

WHO WAS THE MAN?

"How? When? Where?" Patsy demanded with sudden interest. Then he added: "I may as well tell you at once that I saw Madam Savage this morning, soon after ten o'clock, at the Mammoth House, downtown. Wait; let me tell you all about it. I can do it in a few words."

"Go ahead, then," replied the detective.

"I was standing at the Broadway entrance to the Mammoth House, when she got out of a taxicab and entered it. If she saw me at all, she did not recognize me, or, at least, she made no sign of it if she did. There was a man near me who did recognize her, although she did not know him, as I afterward discovered. He followed her into the hotel—to the parlor at the southeast corner—and he clenched his recognition of her, by the aid of a photograph he carried in one of his pockets. He seated himself at the opposite end of the room from her; I sat down near the middle of the room, between them, and used the mirrors for my observations. After a little a woman entered the parlor and spoke to madam. She was not a friend; I doubt if she was even an acquaintance. They talked together in low tones—or, rather, the second woman did nearly all the talking. They were together not more than fifteen minutes, if that much. Then madam gave the other woman a sealed envelope which she took from her hand bag, and the woman left the hotel as if she were shot out of a gun—by the Vesey Street entrance. I thought, for a moment, that madam was going to follow her; but, instead, she went to the Vesey Street window and made wig-wag signals from it to somebody in the street below."

"But, Patsy——"

"Please wait just a moment, chief. Madam started to leave the hotel by the route she had entered it, but the man, I have mentioned, stopped her in the middle of the room, near to me. I heard all that passed between them. The substance of it was that he was from somewhere in the West, and had come to New York to find her, bringing a message—or, rather, two messages, written and oral—to her from her son, Tom. She invited him to ride uptown with her, and I saw them enter the taxicab together at the Broadway entrance to the hotel, and drive away."

"Is that all you have to tell me?" Nick Carter asked his assistant.

"Yes."

"You would recognize that man again, of course?"

"Sure thing."

"Well, in that case, it is up to you to find him, for you seem to be the only person who has seen him; at

least, you are the only one who has had a good look at him. The cab driver has no recollection of his personal appearance, other than that he was a tall man, smooth shaven, and wore rather a wide-brimmed, slouch hat."

"Oh, I'll know him, all right, if I see him again. I'll find him, too, if he is in the land of the living."

"Good. Well, that is your assignment. You can start out on it as soon as you like. Chick and I will take the case from the crime end of it."

"Won't you tell me a little more about that end of it before I go, chief?"

"Yes; although there is very little to tell. The driver's story agrees with what you have told me. His stand is at Madison Square. Shortly after nine o'clock this morning Madam Savage engaged him. He drove her to the Mammoth House. She paid him there, but he waited, and when she came out, engaged him a second time. A man was with her; both entered the cab after she had told the driver to take them to the Wilton, a hotel in Seventh Avenue, just beyond the junction with Broadway."

"I know where it is."

"Well, the man got out of the cab, there. He said to the driver, 'Wait here,' and entered the hotel. The driver waited a little while—five or ten minutes, he says—and feeling thirsty, got down from his seat and crossed the avenue to a saloon on the opposite side."

"Didn't he look inside the cab, or speak to madam when he did that?" Patsy demanded.

"He says he did both."

"Well, he ought to know whether madam was alive then, or not."

"He thinks he does know. He believes, or says he does, that madam was alive when he spoke to her through the open window in the door of the cab. Only—and here is the point, Patsy, he is not certain about it."

"What does he say about it?"

"That when he got down from his seat to go after the drink he glanced in at the window, and saw madam. If anything had happened to her before that, she bore no evidence of it that he could see. She was leaning back in a perfectly natural attitude, against the cushions of the cab. He said to her: 'I'll return in a moment, madam.' He cannot say whether she replied to him or not, but he believes that she nodded her head. He spoke to her from the street side of the cab."

"How long a time was he absent, chief? I don't suppose it makes any difference, for in all probability madam was dead before he left her."

"He was gone ten or fifteen minutes, he says. He came outside of the saloon almost at once, but stood at the curb, opposite the cab, talking with an acquaintance. He says he watched the cab all the time he was there, expecting the reappearance of his other passenger, but that no person approached it. At last he crossed the street and resumed his seat under the steering wheel without looking at, or speaking to madam. He sat there nearly an hour before he began to wonder at the long wait.

"At last he got down again and went to the window of the cab. He spoke to madam, who still occupied relatively the same position as when he had last noticed her; but she did not reply to him. He called to her again, and still she did not answer. He was frightened. A policeman happened to be passing, and the driver called to him. The policeman opened the door of the cab and discovered that madam was dead."

"Stabbed, you say?"

"She had been stabbed through the heart with a queer sort of weapon. I have never known the like of it before," said the detective.

"You have the weapon, then?"

"No; but it was easy enough to determine the size and shape of it, from the wound. It was a weapon at least eight inches in length, but in width and thickness, not larger than the blade of a penknife. She was instantly killed."

"And the man who had been with her in the cab, did not reappear at all?"

"No."

"That chap didn't have the look of a criminal, or of a would-be murderer," said Patsy, half to himself.

Chick spoke for the first time since Patsy entered the room.

"There is another coincidence in this case, Patsy," he said. "Nick has purposely left it for me to tell you about it."

"Another coincidence? What do you mean by that, Chick?"

"Well, it was a coincidence that you should happen to be at the Mammoth House when Madam Savage and the man who rode uptown with her, first met. It was another coincidence that I happened to be passing the Wilton at the very moment when the policeman opened the door of the cab and discovered that a crime had been committed. I was the first person on the scene, after the officer made the discovery."

"Huh! Then it was you who questioned the driver of the cab."

"Yes. I went with him when he drove the body to the station house. I was fortunate in securing the attendance of a coroner almost at once, and obtaining permission very soon to remove the body of Madam Savage to her own house."

"I suppose it goes without saying that the man who rode uptown in the cab with her committed the crime, doesn't it?" Patsy asked.

"It would seem so. Of course, Patsy, it is possible that a person in passing could have thrust an arm through the open window of the cab, and used the queer weapon; but it is highly improbable."

"I should say so. Besides, who would want to murder Madam Savage? She was one of the best, the most charitable, the most kindly women in this town."

"I have never heard that she had an enemy, other than the Gregories," commented the detective. "But, then, I had never heard that she had a son, either, so

that amounts to nothing. Chick has something else to tell you on that point, Patsy."

"You spoke of a written message that the stranger said he had brought to madam," said Chick.

"Yes."

"It was found, with the seal unbroken, in madam's hand bag."

"With the seal unbroken, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Then she had not read the message that the stranger brought to her."

"Evidently not. It would seem that she was content with the oral message, until she might be alone, to read what her son had written to her."

"Well, Chick, didn't you break the seal, and find out what that message contained?" demanded Patsy impatiently.

"Certainly I did. I have a copy of it."

"Did it tell you anything?"

"Very little. Here it is; you may read it."

Patsy received the folded sheet of paper, but he did not glance at it at once.

"Before I start out on a search for that chap who was with her, I want a little more information which I think you can give me," he said; and Nick Carter smiled and nodded his head approvingly.

"All right, Patsy; what is it?" Chick asked.

"Before you drove away with the body, to the station house, did you enter the hotel and make any inquiries about the man in the case?"

"Yes; and with no result whatever. Nobody there remembered to have seen the man leave the cab, or enter the hotel. There was absolutely no trace of him, although the driver of the cab is positive that the man did enter the house."

"When you took the body home, to Madam Savage's house, did you see and talk with Miss Savage? Irene?"

"Yes; but the shock to her was so great that my questions profited nothing."

"Was she—is she aware of the fact that she has a brother, who lives somewhere in the Western country?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is what I am getting at. If she has such a brother, there must be a photograph of him somewhere about the house. If there is one, I would like to see it. I don't suppose it occurred to you to ask for one, Chick?"

"On the contrary, it did. When you read the copy of that letter, you will understand why I asked for one."

"Well?"

"There isn't any. There hasn't been one in the household, nor has a member of the family seen Tom Savage, since he was sixteen years old, when he ran away from home. There are some child photographs of him; but that is all."

"Row in the family when he was sixteen?" asked Patsy.

"Something like that."

"Well, Chick, I had a hunch to-day, when Madam Savage and that stranger were talking together, that he was Tom Savage himself, returned to see his mother, but preferring to represent himself as a messenger. Somehow I have got that hunch stronger than ever, now."

CHAPTER III.

A LETTER BY MESSENGER.

Patsy did not say just how he intended to begin his search for the man he had seen and heard in conversation with Madam Savage; but he had a well-defined purpose in view nevertheless, when he left the house shortly before five o'clock, after his talk with Nick Carter and Chick.

He did not hesitate, once he was upon the street, but hailing a passing taxicab, he gave the address of Madam Savage's house, and was presently admitted there, by the butler, who remembered him at once.

The butler was an old man; he had long been in the service of Madam Savage, and there were traces of tears in his eyes as he stood aside to permit Patsy to enter.

It at once occurred to Patsy that right here at hand was a source of inormation that he had not thought of before.

He drew the butler aside into a small reception room, and after closing the door, said to him:

"Evans, I came here to have a short talk with Miss Savage. Presently I want you to go to her and say how important it is that she should grant me an interview; but, in the meantime, I want to ask you some questions."

"Yes, sir. I only hope that I will be able to answer them, sir," the butler replied.

"I think it not at all unlikely that you will be, if you are so disposed. You have been a very long time in the service of Madam Savage, have you not?"

"Yes, sir; a little more than thirty-five years."

"And you have always served her faithfully and well?"

"To the best of my ability, sir. The length of time that I have been a member of her household is the best proof of that."

"Assuredly. You were very fond of her, always?"

"I have loved her, sir, as only a servant so long in the employ of one person can learn to love his mistress. She was above and beyond everything else in the world to me, sir." Tears sprang to his eyes and his voice trembled as he made that statement.

"I believe you entirely, Evans," said Patsy gently; "and now that she has been foully dealt with—deliberately murdered—you stand ready, do you not, to do everything in your power to bring to justice the man who committed this deed?"

"Yes, sir. Indeed I do."

"No matter who that person might prove to be?"

"No matter who that person might be."

"Then, in that case, you will not hesitate to answer questions relating to the family, which under other circumstances I would not presume to ask?"

"No matter what the questions are, sir, I will reply to them to the best of my ability, if my answers will help to clear this mystery," replied the faithful old servant. His language was every bit as good as Patsy's.

"There was a son born to Madam Savage, of whom I never heard until to-day," said Patsy. "He was called Tom. What do you know about him, and what can you tell me about him?"

The old man showed his surprise at the question, but he replied to it readily enough.

"If it is necessary to tell that story, you may as well have all of it, sir," he said.

"Decidedly."

"There were two sons, Thomas and James."

"Two sons?"

"Yes, sir. They were twins; but unlike most twins, they did not in the least resemble one another. Mr. Thomas was very dark, like his father; Mr. James was fair, like his mother. It was a very sad case, Mr. Garvan."

"How so? What do you mean? Please explain it to me, Evans."

"When the lads were not quite fifteen years old—we were living in Newton, just out of Boston, at the time—they were playing together on the lawn in front of the house. They had found an old cavalry pistol in a rubbish heap back of the stables. No one ever knew exactly how it happened, but that old horse pistol was loaded, and Mr. James was instantly killed."

"By his brother, Thomas?"

"No, sir, I do not think so. I have never thought so. I have always believed that the pistol was in Mr. James' hand when it was discharged. Mr. Thomas said that it was, and I believed him. But, sir, his mother never accepted that view of it."

"Do you mean to tell me that Madam Savage believed that James was killed by his brother? Is that what you mean?" asked Patsy.

"Yes, sir. She did not think that he did it intentionally; don't think that. She thoroughly understood that it was an accident; but she looked with horror upon her other son, ever after it. She could not bear him in sight of her; she shrank away from him whenever he drew near to her. Her attitude so affected the sensitive nature of Mr. Thomas, that shortly after his sixteenth birthday he ran away from home, and he has never been seen or heard from, since."

"I take it that James was his mother's favorite; eh?"

"Decidedly. I used to think, at times, that her fondness for James made her almost dislike Thomas; but, perhaps, I was unjust in regard to that, sir."

"Thomas was your favorite?"

"Yes, sir. I think he was."

"And his father's also?"

"Yes, sir; but General Savage was already dead at that time—at the time of the accident."

"Indeed. How long a time had he been dead?"

"Rather more than three years, sir. He died six months before Miss Irene was born. She was two and a half years old when the accident occurred; she was four when Thomas ran away from home."

"And she is twenty-one, now. That would make Tom Savage thirty-three years old by now."

"Yes, sir; if he is alive."

"You do not know, then, that he is alive?"

"No, sir."

"Has his mother never heard from him since he went away?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Nor his sister?"

"For a year or two after he went away he sometimes sent her little presents; but never a message of any kind."

"It was his mother's horror of him, because she believed that he had accidentally killed his brother, that drove him away from home?"

"Yes, sir. It broke his heart. He adored his mother, and she shrank from him. I do not mean to criticise my beloved mistress, sir—Heaven forbid—but it was the only weakness I have ever observed in her character in all the years I have known her."

"Was there no softening on her part when Tom ran away? Did she not relent after he had gone?"

"Perhaps. I do not know. His name has not been mentioned in my presence since the first week after his disappearance, until you mentioned it to-day."

"Have you a photograph of him, Evans, as he looked then?"

"Yes, sir. It is a tintype. He had it made the very day he went away—and especially for me. I never showed it to madam! she did not know that I had it."

"Is it where you can get it for me? I would like to look at it. Get it for me, while I am talking with Miss Savage. Now, just a few more questions, and then you may announce me."

"Very well, sir."

"What time did Madam Savage take her breakfast this morning?"

"At half-past seven, sir; her usual hour. If she were out nearly all night, it made no difference in her breakfast hour; but she always slept two or three hours immediately after her luncheon, which was served to her at one o'clock."

"She went out quite early this morning, did she not?"

"Yes, sir. Shortly after nine o'clock."

"Was that a usual thing with her—to go out so early?"

"It was not exactly unusual, sir."

"Do you happen to know anything about the errand that called her out this morning?"

"No, sir. She made no mention of it to me."

"Has she seemed disturbed about anything, of late?

Have you noticed that she was troubled, or angered, nervous, or distressed about anything?"

"No, sir. Not exactly that."

"But there was something? Your tone implies that much."

"A messenger boy came here with a letter for her, day before yesterday, in the afternoon. Madam was asleep at the time and I would not disturb her, so the messenger waited, saying that he must have an answer."

"Well?"

"When madam rang for her maid I sent the letter to her. A few moments later the maid came down and asked for the messenger. She said to him, 'You may say to the person who sent the message to Madam Savage, that the answer is yes.' Madam did not destroy that letter. She kept it with her, and I saw her reading it, two or three times. I recognized it by the envelope."

"Is that all that you noticed?"

"All save the fact that she frowned and seemed otherwise disturbed when she was reading the letter; and throughout the day, yesterday, I imagined that she was preoccupied. Also, it was the first time for more than a year that I have known her to omit her afternoon rest."

"Do you know if she had that letter with her when she went out this morning?"

"Yes, sir, she did. She opened her hand bag as she was passing out. As she took her handkerchief from the bag, I noticed that there were two envelopes there. The top one was the same that the messenger brought here."

"You are quite sure of that, are you, Evans?"

"Quite so; yes, sir."

"I would very much like to know who that messenger boy was," said Patsy, half to himself, "but I don't suppose there is any possibility of finding that out, now."

"Oh, yes, there is, sir. I was in the service of General Savage before he was married. He was a very methodical and particular man about most things. He taught me certain duties from which I have never deviated. One of them was always to note down the time of the arrival of letters, and if brought by a messenger, to obtain the name or the number of that messenger, sir, as well as the time that he arrived here with it. I will give them to you, sir, when I show you the picture of Mr. Thomas."

"Evans, you are invaluable. You are one servant in ten thousand."

"Thank you, sir."

"And that reminds me——"

"Yes, sir?"

"You have said that when a lad, Thomas very much resembled his father; eh? And he is about the age now that his father was at the time of his death? Isn't that true?"

"Very nearly, sir. The general was thirty-six when he died."

"Well, see if you can scare up a picture of the general, that was taken shortly before his death. If you have one I would like to see it. It is possible that Thomas might have continued to resemble his father as he grew older. Now, if you please, I will see Miss Savage."

CHAPTER IV.

A COMPLICATED CASE.

Patsy found Irene Savage very greatly indisposed. She received him in a darkened room, but she received him kindly and calmly—very much as her mother might have done under like circumstances.

"I am very sorry to trouble you at this time, Miss Savage," said Patsy, "but it seemed necessary."

"I am afraid that I can't permit you to remain but a moment, Mr. Garvan," she replied.

"That is all that I require. I wish to ask you two questions, and to make one request of you, Miss Savage."

"Very well."

"The first question is this: Do you know anything about the contents of a letter that was sent to your mother the day before yeserday, by messenger?"

"I know that she received such a message as you say, but she did not speak to me of it, and I have not the least idea what the message contained, or what it was about. Do you suppose, Mr. Garvan, that it had anything to do with this—this awful thing that has happened?"

"No. It may have had something to do with it; that is all. We do not want to neglect any point. The second question is this: Have you received any word or message from your brother Thomas, or concerning him, at any time, recently?"

"No, sir, I have not. The last information we had concerning him was received by me only a few weeks after he left home, seventeen years ago. I have never heard from him from that day to this, and my mother has never received any word from him at all. Personally, I do not believe he is alive, for if he were, I think he would have communicated with me long ago."

"That answers the last uestion I will trouble you with to-day, Miss Savage. Now, as to the request I mentioned."

"Yes. What is it? If I can comply with it, I will be glad to do so."

"It is a very simple one. I have reason to believe that your brother is alive, and that your mother expected to see him before very long."

"Oh, sir——"

"Wait one moment, please, Miss Savage."

"Yes, sir."

"It is possible that this terrible thing that has befallen you may have had some connection with the reappearance of your brother. I cannot even make a guess as to that; but I am reasonably well informed when I tell you that I think your mother heard from

your brother this morning. The particulars about that I will tell you later; to-morrow, perhaps."

"Oh, do, sir, as soon as ever you can."

"And now I come to the request I had to make concerning him."

"Yes? Yes?"

"If you should hear from your brother, or about him, within the next few days, will you instruct Evans to call Mr. Carter, or me, on the telephone at once, and announce the fact?"

"Indeed I will, sir. Do you really think it is possible?"

"I don't know as to that, Miss Savage. I only assert that it may be so, and I would like to know about it at once, if it should be so."

"You shall, Mr. Garvan. I promise you that much."

"Thank you. Then I will take my leave."

"But you will come again to-morrow, and tell me about what you have said?" she questioned him eagerly.

"Yes. I will do that. I will come to see you sometime to-morrow."

Patsy left her then, and returned to the small reception room where he had talked with the butler, and he found Evans awaiting him.

Without a word the man extended toward Patsy a photograph made in tintype, showing a manly-looking young chap of sixteen, who stood tall and straight and looked self-reliant for his years, and in whom Patsy had no difficulty in tracing a close resemblance to the man he had seen in conversation with Madam Savage, that morning.

If he needed added evidence of the correctness of the identification, he found it in the other picture which Evans brought into the room.

It was a large picture, in a frame, which the butler had evidently taken from its place on some wall in the residence.

It was the portrait of a man in the uniform of the United States army of twenty years ago, and it represented General Savage when he was near the age that his son Thomas should be now.

Save for the uniform, it might have been the very man whom Patsy had seen in the company of Madam Savage that morning.

There was no longer any doubt in Patsy's mind that it had been Tom Savage in person, who had accosted Madam Savage; nor could there be any doubt that she had recognized him instantly. The almost exact resemblance to his father must have rendered it impossible to do otherwise.

But, if she had recognized and known him, why had she pretended that she did not?

Did the woman, at that strange meeting, still hate the son whom she believed had accidentally shot his brother to death? Could the nature of a woman who had the reputation of being so kind to others, be so remorseless to her own son?

Here was presented a complication which had never occurred to Patsy. Although he had had the idea that the man was really Tom Savage, Madam Savage's son, it had never occurred to him until this moment that she had recognized him when he addressed her.

Why, then, had she conducted herself in such a manner, and why, as a consequence of one of those meetings of hers at the Mammoth House, had she been so foully murdered?

It was easy to understand why Thomas Savage had not expected to be recognized, and had shown no surprise because he was not known at once by his mother.

He could not know that he had grown to manhood almost an exact counterpart of his father who had died when he, himself, was only about twelve years old.

But the likeness was so strong, so perfect, so complete in every way that the woman could not have failed to see it at once. It should have been to her almost as if her husband had stepped out of the grave into life again, and stood before her.

Patsy examined the portrait critically; then he gave it back to Evans without a word of comment other than——

"He certainly was a fine-looking chap, Evans."

"Yes, sir; that he was. And as fine a man as ever lived. Just before he died he begged me to stay on with madam and the little ones, as long as they needed me, and I have done so. If it had not been for that promise to him, sir, I should have gone away soon after Mr. Thomas left us."

"And yet you say you were very fond of your mistress, Evans."

"Yes, sir; and more fond still of Miss Irene."

"Tell me, Evans, was the marriage between the general and madam a happy one?"

"Ah, sir, as to that I have nothing to say. It cannot affect the subject that is interesting us now."

"You might as well admit at once——"

"I know, sir—if you will pardon me for interrupting you—there were times when things did not go as smoothly as they might have done. Madam was a very beautiful woman in those days. She remained beautiful, but not with the beauty of her youth."

"And—she—was fond of admiration, we will say?"

"Just that, sir, and never anything worse; to that I will swear with my dying breath. But she did love admiration, and there was one—but I need not talk about that."

"I wish you would, Evans. It can do no harm, now; and it may do a lot of good. One never can tell."

"How so, sir?"

"It is barely possible that one of the left-over passions of those early days would lead, somehow, to the tragedy of this morning. Let us hope not; but it is possible."

"No, sir; if you will pardon me, that is not possible at all."

"Well, anyhow, your words have implied that the general and madam had frequent quarrels."

"Yes, sir. Stormy ones; but that was more than twenty years ago."

"I know. And those quarrels were the result of jealousy, weren't they?"

"There was never any other cause, sir."

"What was the cause of the general's death, Evans?"

"Ah, sir, I have been fearing that you would ask that question."

"Well, answer it."

"Well, sir, that was also the result of an accident," said the butler, with marked hesitation.

"Another shooting affair, Evans?"

"No, sir; the general was thrown from a horse. He was injured internally. He lived only three days after the accident, sir."

"Tell me about it; all about it, Evans."

"They were riding together, sir, on horseback—side by side. The general was mounted on a horse that he had only just purchased. The animal was a big, surly brute—a chestnut. It was only the second time that the general had ever been on his back."

"Well?"

"I never knew just how it happened, sir, only that the day before the general died I heard madam begging him to forgive her. She was sobbing out to him that it was all her fault; that if she had not lost her temper and struck the horse with her whip, the accident would not have happened; the general would not have been thrown. In that moment, sir, I think I hated her; but I have long ago got over that."

"And after that she hated one of her sons because he happened to resemble his father. I must say that I never pictured Madam Savage as such a character."

"Ah, sir, she has softened in her later years. She was not at all the same woman she used to be."

"I can well believe that. You have given me lots of food for thought, Evans; and you have explained, without knowing it, a circumstance that was puzzling me mightily."

"Will you tell me what that is, sir?" the butler asked timidly.

"Not at present. It is not necessary, and it would only distress you."

To himself Patsy was thinking about that sudden narrowing of the eyes on the part of Madam Savage when the strange man accosted her in the parlor of the hotel. He was thinking of her refusal to recognize that man, even though she must have known instantly who he was.

He was thinking, too, of that mysterious ride in the taxicab, uptown, to the door of the Wilton, and wondering what could have happened between those two, within the privacy of that cab.

Had the mother told her son then that she recognized him? Had she refused to accept his advances, when he had come so far to seek and find her? Had she berated him for the death of that other son, whom Tom insisted had shot himself with the old pistol? Had she so incensed him that he had struck the blow that had taken his mother's life?

"No, no, no," Patsy thought to himself. "I cannot believe that; and I am going to make it my especial duty to prove that it is not so. Only, if it isn't so, why did the son disappear so strangely, and where has he gone? What is keeping him away when he must know that his mother is dead, and that he, having been the last one known to be with her, must stand accused of the crime?"

Truly it was a complicated case that Patsy had so strangely come upon.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSING SATCHEL.

It will be remembered that at the time of the interview between Patsy and Irene Savage, less than five hours had elapsed since the discovery of the crime in the taxicab.

A recapitulation of the incidents of the day as Patsy understood them, was as follows:

At ten o'clock in the morning Patsy had stood at one end of the steps at the Broadway entrance to the Mammoth House, and had noticed a gentleman who stood at the opposite end of them; he had noticed the man for three reasons: Because he was a handsome man in appearance; because of the breezy, Western air about him; and because of the attitude he bore of utter abandon to the enjoyment of the panoramic scenes that were taking place before him, along the busiest thoroughfare in the world.

"Surely," he thought, "a man of that character and that demeanor could not have had murder in his heart, and should have naught but kindly feelings toward all mankind."

At a few minutes past ten he had seen Madam Savage leave a taxicab at the door and enter the hotel. The strange man had followed her into the parlor of the house. She had met a woman who was evidently strange to her; some sort of a transaction had passed between them, and whatever it was, there was no doubt that it was distasteful to Madam Savage.

The strange woman had taken sudden leave after receiving an envelope from madam, contents unknown. Then madam had gone to the window and made signals to some person outside, demonstrating the fact that she had not gone there without some sort of guard, or, at least, some sort of watchful care.

"It is likely," Patsy thought, "that the person to whom she signaled through the window, was directed by that signal, to follow the woman who went to the hotel to see Madam Savage. I'll make a mental note to try and get a line on that person who waited outside for madam."

Then came the incident when Tom Savage—Patsy no longer had the least doubt that the man was Thomas Savage—spoke to his mother as she was on her way out of the parlor.

Shortly before eleven o'clock the two had entered the taxi together, and that was the last that was personally known to Patsy concerning them.

Then came Chick's part of the affair—but the recapitulation need go no farther.

It was all so plain to Patsy that he felt almost as if he had seen the arrival at the Hotel Wilton of the taxicab; as if he had seen Tom Savage get down from the cab and enter the hotel on some errand, leaving his mother to await his return.

Then the departure of the cab driver to cross the thoroughfare; his return ten or fifteen minutes later, the long wait that followed upon his return, and then the discovery of the awful thing that had happened, coincident upon the arrival of Chick upon the scene.

The mysterious thing about the whole affair was the non-return of Tom Savage to the taxi.

That part of it did have a bad look so far as Thomas Savage was concerned. Patsy was compelled to admit that much, even while he was determined not to believe that Thomas Savage had stabbed his own mother to death.

He walked away from the home of the Savages, deep in thought.

He felt that the case was his; that it belonged to him by right of precedence; and he believed himself capable of solving it to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Nick Carter, his chief, had sent him out on the specific duty of finding the man who had accompanied Madam Savage in the taxicab; but he would do more than that, he promised himself. He would also find the person who had committed the terrible crime, and he was confident that they were not the same.

He boarded a Madison Avenue car and rode to Fifty-ninth Street, thence a crosstown car to Seventh Avenue, and he walked from there to the Hotel Wilton, near Broadway.

At the entrance to the hotel, he came to a pause. A new idea had occurred to him—one to which he had given no thought before that moment. We are permitted to read the thought as it took form in his mind, and it was as follows:

"Tom Savage arrived in the city at six o'clock this very morning, from the West; he came here to see his mother whom he had not seen in seventeen years; he must have had some baggage, a grip, at least, if not a trunk; he went to the Mammoth House for his breakfast, and to await a suitable hour for calling upon his mother in the character of a stranger, which he had elected to assume until he should discover how she felt toward him. Perhaps he registered at the hotel, possibly he did not do so; but, at least, he disposed of his baggage in some manner, and if he did not register, he doubtless put his grip in the parcel room and received a check for it." And then:

"Whatever the errand at the Hotel Wilton, it is not likely that it had anything to do with Tom Savage. It must have been his mother's errand. It must have been by her direction that the cab went to that hotel; it must have been at her solicitation that Tom left the cab, and his mother, at the door, while he entered the hotel. He was on business for her, and not for himself, and from that idea I draw two conclusions:

"The first one is that Tom had already made himself known to his mother, when they arrived at the Wilton. That is strengthened by the discovery of the letter he brought to her, with the seal unbroken. She did not have to read it at once, since he had made himself known—and particularly since it was undeniable that she must have recognized him at once.

"The second one is that the business that took Madam Savage to that hotel must have had some connection or association with the same affair that had taken her to the Mammoth House."

Patsy entered the hotel and went straight to the desk. It was one of the few hotels in the city where he was unknown.

"I want to see your registry list for the day before yesterday, and the day preceding that one," he said to the clerk; but, although he studied them carefully, he found no name or names there which particularly attracted his attention.

As he was turning away from the desk, intending to leave the place, he discovered, seated in an armchair and busily engaged in reading an evening paper, no less a person than Nick Carter himself—and even Patsy would not have recognized his chief, had it not been that the disguise that Nick wore was one with which he was familiar.

Patsy turned back again to the desk and secured a sheet of paper; then, with that in his hand, he walked past the chair in which Nick was seated, and managed to catch the eye of the detective, after which he continued on his way to the writing room.

He seated himself at one of the desks in that room, and, pencil in hand, began to draw, from memory, a likeness of the woman who had talked with Madam Savage at the Mammoth House; and having finished the sketch to his satisfaction, he glanced around him and discovered that Nick had followed him into the room and was seated at an adjoining writing desk.

Taking a second sheet of paper, he wrote upon it this message:

"This is as good a likeness as I can make, from memory, of the woman who talked with madam, downtown. It is good enough to serve, I think. I am convinced that she, or something associated with her, is the golden key to the mystery; also that the trip of the taxi to this place had something to do with her. I am going to that other hotel to work out another idea. I will be there in half an hour, will remain there one hour, and will then report at the house. Have some valuable information concerning the family which I will disclose later on."

He folded that message with the drawing he had made, and placed both in an envelope; then, as he passed from the room, he dexterously flipped the envelope containing them, upon the table in front of Nick.

Patsy walked to the Fiftieth Street station of the subway, and entered the Mammoth House just twenty-

five minutes later. Again he had recourse to the register, paying no attention to the names, but giving particular care to the study of places from which the guest had registered that morning, as well as to the hour of their arrival, which in each case was duly entered in the left-hand margin.

Almost at once he discovered this entry:

"Jasper Rube, Hellangone, Montana." The time of the entry was marked six-fifty a. m. of that same day, and Patsy had not the slightest doubt that the name had been written there by the man whom he believed to be Thomas Savage.

Patsy signaled to the clerk, who was well known to him.

"I want to see Mr. Jasper Rube, of Hellangone, Montana," he said, pointing to the name.

"Front!" said the clerk; and then, when one of the black hall boys came to the desk: "Take the gentleman's card to——"

"Hold on a moment," said Patsy, interrupting him. "If it's all the same to you I'll go to the room with the hall boy; and I wish you would give him a pass-key, in case the man is not there, and the room is locked. I want to look around me a bit."

The clerk nodded. He knew Patsy.

"No fuss, I hope," he said. "We like to avoid that sort of thing if we can, you know."

"Not the least bit in the world," replied Patsy reassuringly. "I'll promise that."

"All right. Go ahead," said the clerk, handing over the pass-key.

There was no response when Patsy rapped upon the door of the room to which he had been directed, and, after repeating the summons two or three times, he made use of the key, and entered.

One quick glance around him was sufficient.

It was evident to the young detective that the man had not entered the room at all; that he had registered, taken the room, had gone to breakfast, and afterward had taken his stand on the steps outside where he had encountered Madam Savage. After that events had taken place so rapidly that no opportunity was afforded him to go to his room.

There was no satchel there, either; and hence, when registering, the man must have told the boy to check his grip, if he had one, and that he would go to his room after he had breakfasted.

"Mr. Jasper Rube hasn't been to his room at all," he said to the clerk, when he returned to the office floor.

"No. I have been making inquiries about him since you went upstairs, Patsy. You see, I was not on duty when he arrived this morning."

"Well, what is the result of your inquiries?"

"Mr. Rube—that's a queer name, isn't it—came in on the Pennsylvania, this morning; at least, that is what he said. He registered, was assigned to that room which he paid for two days in advance, gave his grip to one of the boys and received a check for it, and then went into the dining room for breakfast. The——"

"Is the boy who received his grip and who gave the man the check for it, on duty now?"

"Yes. He came on at six this morning, went off at noon, and on again at six to-night. We have the long and short day system here, you know. But wait a moment."

"Well?"

"Peter—that's the hall boy's name—has a most remarkable memory for numbers. I remember the fact and asked him if he remembered the number of the check he gave to Mr. Jasper Rube. He does; it was thirty-eight. I sent him to the porter to find out if the satchel was still there, in his care, and it isn't. That's all. The man must have returned later and taken his grip away, or he sent somebody for it. His room is paid for two days in advance, so it makes no difference to us. There might have been papers in it that he wanted, and that he will return here later on. That is all I know about the case, Patsy."

"Peter may have made a mistake in the number on the check," suggested Patsy.

"That is possible, but it isn't likely. I have always found him correct about such things. Particularly when he is positive about it himself; but you can ask him."

Patsy did ask Peter, but with no result. The negro was positive about the number of the check, and equally certain that the satchel was no longer in the hotel.

Question: Did Tom Savage return to the hotel in person to get his grip? Did he send some other person after it, or was he somehow deprived of the check, and——

CHAPTER VI.

MESSENGER NUMBER 00029.

While on his way home from the Mammoth House Patsy bethought himself of the letter which Chick had copied and given him to read. It was still in his pocket, but in the stress of the afternoon's work he had for-

gotten it. In the subway he took it from his pocket and read it.

It was dated at Hellangone, Montana, just one week ago, and it was as follows:

"DEAR MOTHER: Mr. Jasper Rube, a friend of mine, is going to New York. I have begged him to carry a verbal message to you, from me, and also this letter. After seventeen years of self-imposed exile I feel strongly the desire to see you and my sister, Irene, again, but I have no desire to impose myself upon you unless it is your wish that I should go to you. Surely that awful thing that happened so long ago, and for which I was in no manner at fault, cannot influence you against me now. I did not even find the old pistol; Jimmy found it himself and would barely permit me to touch it.

"I have prospered, mother. I have done well out here in this free country.

"'Where a man is a man, if he's willing to toil,
And the humblest may gather the fruits of the soil!'

"It isn't exactly 'the fruits of the soil' that I have gathered, but I have got together a very fair bunch of cattle, and I own a good ranch and range.

"I am going East, mother, to see you and Irene. May I hope that I will be received as your only son, now living, should be received by his mother? I pray that it may be so, and that I will not meet with a disappointment which will go far toward breaking my heart.

"I have met, out here, a man who knew you and my father, when Jimmy and I were little kiddies. He has no idea of my identity, because I have not used my own name; but for some strange reason, which I have never been able to understand, he insists upon talking about you and my father, every time we meet, and he says many things by innuendo, which I find it difficult not to resent. A week ago things came to a climax, and I was obliged to give him a lashing with my quirt—he is a much older man than I; about your own age, I imagine. Yesterday his son, accompanied by three men of their outfit, rode over here and tried to kill me. He didn't do it, and he won't try it on again till he gets well, which will take some little time, I think; but, in the meantime, I've got to take a trip for my health, and so I shall follow Rube to the East within a few days. He will know where to find me, if you are willing to see me. If you're not—— Well, we might better all be dead than living in this way. I shall see my sister, no matter what stands in the way.

"Affectionately your son,

"THOMAS SAVAGE."

"There isn't a thing in that letter which is of the slightest interest in this case, unless it is in the reference to the man in the West who insisted upon talking about Madam Savage and the general, whenever he was in the presence of the son. There can be no sort of doubt that he recognized Tom Savage by means of the likeness he bears to his father," was Patsy's mental comment as he refolded the copied letter and returned it to his pocket.

Tom Savage had not mentioned the man's name, and now Patsy recalled that in his talk with Evans, the butler, the latter had referred to one man of whom the general had been jealous, in those days so long ago.

"There was one——" he had said, and stopped. Then had followed the butler's admission that madam had been partly responsible, if not wholly so, for the accident which had resulted in the death of her husband.

Patsy was shaking his head doubtfully, greatly puzzled over the complication of affairs, when he left the subway and walked rapidly homeward. It was nearly nine o'clock when he entered the house to find that neither Nick nor Chick had yet arrived.

He went into the library and snapped on the lights. He glanced at a memorandum that Evans had given him, looked in the telephone book and took down the receiver.

"Hello?" he said presently. "Main office of the telegraph company."

"Yes," came the reply.

"This is the residence of Nick Carter, in Madison Avenue. I want messenger, number 00029. If he is on duty at the present time send him here at once. If he is not on duty, send another boy after him, and have him brought here as quickly as possible."

"Wait a moment, please. . . . He is on duty, but he is out. He is due back here within half an hour. Will that do?"

"Yes; if you will send him here as soon as he returns."

"I will do that, certainly."

"It may be that I will keep him with me for a day or two."

"Oh, that's all right. Keep him as long as you like, at the regular rates; only notify us."

"Yes. Now, let me be sure that I have the number I want. What is the name of 00029?"

"Herbert Runter. The boys call him 'Runt,' or 'Runtie.'"

"Very good. Get him up here as soon as possible."

Patsy had not seen an evening paper that day; his mind had been too busily occupied with other matters. Three of them, however were upon the library table where Joseph had placed them in readiness for his master when he should return. The young detective gath-

ered them in his hand as he crossed the room toward a comfortable chair, to await the arrival of the messenger boy who had carried the letter to Madam Savage—the letter that had undoubtedly called her out upon the errand that had culminated in her death.

He permitted them to rest upon his knees for a moment, without looking at them particularly, but presently he dropped his eyes to the page of the top one, that was staring up at him—and instantly started upright in his chair, surprised by what he saw.

Directly across the top of the front page of that particular paper, just above the title of it, where, of late, it has become the custom to put a line of the most startling news, and the latest, he read, and then reread the two lines which had so surprised him.

GENTLEMAN, SOUTH END MAMMOTH HOUSE STEPS, BROADWAY ENTRANCE, TEN THIS MORNING, BE AT NEWS STAND, GRAND CENTRAL STATION, TEN TOMORROW MORNING. OCCASION OF GREATEST IMPORTANCE.

"Well, now, what do you think of that?" Patsy exclaimed aloud, addressing himself, and still staring at the two lines in big capital letters. "What do you think of that?" he repeated, as if to find some expression to his feelings. "There is only one person who could have put that ad. in the paper, and that is Mr. Jasper Rube, otherwise, Thomas Savage. Gee, but that chap has got sense! I don't believe that even I would have thought of such a method. He wanted that sentence to be read by the man who was there on the steps, and he didn't want to run the chance of an ordinary advertisement. It wouldn't have been quick enough. Those two lines must have cost him a thousand dollars."

All this aloud, addressing himself, and Patsy was not one to speak his thoughts aloud, at any time. But some excuse may be found in the excitement he felt over the discovery.

He folded the paper carefully and put it in his pocket, hoping that neither Nick nor Patsy had seen it, and wishing that they might not know about it, until after he had kept the appointment.

Patsy did not recall that the man who had so strangely attracted his attention, had looked at him at all; and yet here was proof positive that he had done so. Proof, also, perhaps, that he had noticed Patsy again, in the hotel parlor.

Once he took the paper from his pocket and after smoothing it out carefully, put it on the table with the other papers. He felt that it was his duty to tell Nick all about it; but, again, after more thought, he refolded it and stowed it away out of sight.

All of the papers had long accounts of the tragedy in front of the Wilton, and he skipped through them, reading the essential parts of the different "stories," and not greatly edified by any of them.

There was not an account of the crime which did not cling to the theory that the murder had been done by the man who had ridden uptown in the cab, with the victim. More than ever, since he had seen those two lines in the paper, Patsy was convinced that he was not the criminal.

Then the bell rang, and Joseph presently appeared in the doorway.

"Messenger, sir, for the chief," he said. "He says he was sent for."

"Quite right, Joseph. I sent for him. Let him come in here," Patsy replied; and to the boy who entered the room, he added: "Close the door behind you. That's right. Now stand under the light—so. Correct. I want to get a good look at you."

"Well, you seem to be getting it, all right, all right," the boy responded, with a half grin. "I hope you like my particular style of beauty, mister. It ain't much to brag about, but it's good as far as it goes. Want me to do any stunts for you? Say! Is this a lunatic asylum, or only a boozorium? Maybe you're the head boozerino? Anyhow, I ain't no Nickelodium."

"You'll do, I think," said Patsy. "Sit down."

"Thanks—awfully."

"You're Runt, aren't you?"

"That's what the guys who are bigger than me, call me; it ain't safe for the small fry."

"Herbert Runter, by name?"

"The same, sir; very much at your service. What have I struck, anyhow? What am I up against, mister?"

"A proposition that will earn you about ten dollars a day, for a few days, if you can carry it off."

"In addition to my regular pay?"

"Yes."

"I'm on. What's the answer?"

Patsy wrote Madam Savage's name and address upon a slip of paper and passed it to the lad. He was short in stature, freckled of feature, red-headed, sharp-eyed, clean-cut, sharp, shrewd—a regular dyed-in-the-wool street boy of New York who had graduated from selling papers to something better and was determined to keep on climbing.

"You carried a letter to that address during the afternoon of the day before yesterday," he said.

"I did. What of it?"

"You waited there some time for an answer to the letter. Tell me what the answer was."

"It was just one word: Yes."

"To whom did you deliver that answer, and when did you deliver it, and where?"

"I'll answer that question backward, if you don't mind, sir."

"Go ahead, so long as you answer it."

"I'd like to know, first, if I'm already engaged in your service, at ten per, mister?"

"If you make good in your answers, you are."

"I delivered the answer at the Hotel Wilton, in Broadway and——"

"I know. Go on."

"Ah half-past five o'clock that afternoon, to a woman."

"What sort of a woman?"

"A female woman, I reckon she was. She looked the part."

"There is such a thing as being too smart, Herbert; don't try it on me, please. Forget that you are a kid. Try to be a man. Reply to my questions as they should be answered, or get out. Which is it to be?"

"I'll play the man's part, sir."

"All right. Tell me the story of that letter, and of the woman, from the time you received the call until you completed it," said Patsy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE VEIL.

"I'm afraid that you won't think there is very much to tell, mister," the messenger replied. "It was just an ordinary call, and I was sent out on it. Anyhow, it was this way:

"I'm down at the main office, you know. Well, at one-fifty-three in the afternoon, day before yesterday, I was sent out with that letter you're talking about. His nibs who's at the window in the front office punched the button, and I went around to see what's doin'. There's a woman there, dressed out to beat the band, but with a veil over her mug—over her face, I mean—that you can't see nothin' trough; see?"

"Yes."

"She catches hold of me sleeve and pulls me to one side, and the first thing she does then is to flash a two-spot on me; an' she says: 'Boy, I've a letter that I want you to deliver for me, and wait for an answer, no matter if it takes you till to-morrow. You can keep this two-dollar bill for your own, and bring the other bill to me when you bring the answer.'

"'All right, lady,' I says. 'That suits me all right.'

"Then she gives me the letter, addressed like you've written it here, only for one thing."

"What was that?"

"You have written here, just plain 'Madam Savage,' with the address. The letter I delivered was addressed to Madam Natalie Savage."

"Very well. Go on."

"She gives me the letter, and then she says: 'Take that to the address. Tell the butler, to whom you will doubtless have to deliver it, that it is important and that you must have an answer. If madam is not at home, or cannot be seen when you arrive there, wait. Don't come away from that house without an answer.'

"'All right, lady,' I says again; then I ducks around to the rear office for my ticket, but the lady yells at me before I get there, and calls me back again.

"'Wait,' she says. 'I'm not through with you, yet.'

"'All right, lady,' I says again. 'You can go as far as you like.'

"With that she tells me that when I get the answer I'm to take it to the Hotel Wilton, and I asks her who I shall ask for when I gets there with the answer; and she says, 'Never mind about that, boy.'

"'But I don't know your name, lady,' I says; and quick as a gun she fires back at me with——

"'I know you, and that is sufficient. You take your answer to the Wilton, as I have directed. Sit down on one of the chairs in the main office, and wait there till I speak to you and ask for the answer. Mind that you wait for me, no matter how long a time it takes. Maybe you will get another tip if you do it right.'

"Well, with that she does the pivot, and beats it. I goes back to the rear office and gets my ticket. I goes to the address on the envelope where an old guy, who looks like a bank president in his servant's clothes, opens the door for me. He takes the letter from me, looks at it a minute, wrinkles his nut as if it ached, and says, 'Madam is resting. She cawnt be disturbed now, me lad.'

"'All right, I'll wait,' I says, and drops onto one of the chairs in the hall.

"Then the old guy takes my name and my number, and writes both of 'em down with a pencil. And, say,

I did have to wait, and that's no dream. But bimeby his nibs sends the letter aloft, somewhere, and pretty soon a piece of calico in a white apron comes down to me, and she says, says she:

"'Messenjaire, you are to say to ze persong who sent you here, zat ze answer iss, yes.'

"I beat it then for the Wilton, and got there a little before five o'clock. I took a chair and passed the time reading a Frank Merriwell story till half-past five, and then the woman shows up."

"Where did she come from?" asked Patsy. "The hotel, or the street?"

"She came in at the front entrance from the street," the boy replied promptly. "I was engaged in reading, all right, but I was keeping my eyes open, too, and I saw her before she saw me. I kept an eye on her over the top of my 'Tip-Top,' you see, and I saw her rubberin' around until her lamps got my focus. She comes over and drops onto the chair next to me, sayin' in a whisper as she does so:

"'Be still, boy, till I speak to you.'

"Pretty soon she says to me, 'Put the answer inside of this paper, and return it to me,' and then she passes over one of the evening papers.

"'There ain't any written answer,' I says to her, in a whisper that I knew she could hear. 'I was told to tell you that the answer is, yes.'

"With that she bounces up out of the chair as if there was springs under her, pitches me a little green wad which I finds out to be another two-spot when I unfolds it, and she sashayes out of the door and down the street—down Broadway, that is—without another word. She didn't give me a chance to tell her that the bill for the afternoon was two-fifty-five; but, anyhow, I'm one-forty-five winner, and I let it go at that. That's the whole story, mister."

"Did she wear the veil the second time you saw her, Herbert?" asked Patsy.

"Yep; just the same."

"And you had no opportunity to see her face?"

"No more'n if she hadn't had one. She was a white woman, and that's all I know about her. I could see part of her neck."

"Would you think that she was young, middle-aged, or old?"

"Anywhere from twenty to forty, maybe; but that's pure guessing."

"Richly gowned?"

"Eh? Oh! Yes, I suppose so. She looked sort uh swell, if that's what you mean."

"What was the color of her hair? You could see that, couldn't you?"

"Sure thing. It was almost black; very dark, anyhow."

"And her voice?"

"Say, I'd know that anywhere I heard it, among ten thousand other voices. It was the first thing I noticed about her when she spoke to me down at the main office."

"Anything else about her that you noticed particularly?"

"Uh-huh; the way she carried herself—like a race horse; and the way she carried her head when she walked—a little to one side, you know; and the way she put up first one hand and then another, to feel for stray hairs, or loosened hairpins; and a gold chain that she wore around her neck with a mighty peculiar locket fastened to it. She was the goods, all right, mister."

"Herbert, when I telephoned to the main office a while ago, to have you sent up here, I told the manager, or whoever it was who replied to me, that I might keep you in my employ several days; so that is understood."

"Yes, sir. He told me that, too."

"When you got here I told you that you could earn ten dollars a day over and above your pay and expenses, if you made good; eh?"

"That's right."

"Well, you have made good; or, at least, I believe you can do it, and that is the same thing."

"I'll try my level best, sir."

"Your business is to find that woman for me. Do you think you can do it?"

"Gee! I don't know. It's a big contract, sir.'

"It is very important that I should find her, and when you do discover her, I dont want her to get the idea that you have been looking for her. Perhaps, if she sees you again, she may speak to you. You have served her once, to her satisfaction, and it is possible that she may give you another opportunity, if she happens to run across you. Now, I don't think that the woman is staying at the Wilton. I do think that she has been in the habit of going into that hotel, but for reasons she is likely to keep away from it now."

"Say, mister——"

"My name is Garvan. I am an assistant to Nick Carter."

"Say, Mister Garvan, has this stunt got anything to do with that murder that happened in front of the Wilton to-day?"

"Have you any special reason for asking that question, or is it mere curiosity?" Patsy demanded, impressed by the earnestness of the lad."

"Well, you see, I took a letter to Madam Savage; I took the answer to that letter to the Wilton; Madam Savage was killed in front of the Wilton. I just put two and two together and figured it out that maybe I was helping Nick Carter and you to run down that crime. Am I?"

"You are."

"Je-ru-sa-lem, the golden! Mr. Garvan, this is the happiest moment of my life. I'd ruther do that than be president of a ball team—and that has been the height of my ambition. Say, Mr. Garvan, you needn't pay me that ten per—leastwise, you needn't unless I find the woman. When do I start in?"

"Right now, if you like; only, of course, you must not stay up all night."

"Oh, I'll attend to the eat and sleep part of it, all right. Can I work the game in my own way, to suit myself?"

"Certainly. How old are you, Herbert?"

"Eighteen, goin' on nineteen."

"You're a good lad, I believe, Herbert. Where do you live?"

"Up in the Bronx with my mother. I take care of her now. She ain't very well, but she's a lot better since I made her give up takin' in sewin'. I'm going to try to send her into the country after a while for a rest, and this money, if I can earn it, will help me a lot."

"You will earn it, I think, Herbert. You mean to earn it, and that is half the battle. When one starts out with good intentions and tries their level best to live up to them, sooner or later success will come. Now, here is some money for your expenses."

Patsy took a roll of bills from his pocket and gave the boy five ten-dollar bills.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I won't need all that, will I?"

"You can't tell what you may need. When you find the woman, I want you to find out where she lives, so that I can find her, too. You may have to take cabs, or railroad trains, or steamboats. It is best to have a supply of cash with you, for emergencies."

"What am I to do when I find her?"

"That's the way to talk. You didn't say if I find her; you said when I find her. That doesn't admit of defeat, does it?"

"No, sir. What am I to do when I have nailed her?"

"Send me a telegram, addressed to Patrick Garvan, at this address. Word the telegram like this: Meet me at such and such a place, and give the time I am to meet you. If I am not at the appointed place on time, leave written directions which I will ask for. One thing is important, and you must not forget it."

"What is that, sir?"

"Once you have found the woman don't lose sight of her until I have found you."

"I've got that down, all right."

"I think you had better continue to wear your uniform, Herbert, because I depend quite as much upon the woman's recognizing you, and speaking to you, as I do upon your ability to identify her, when you see her. But try not to let her suspect that you have been seeking her, if you should meet in that way."

"Yes, sir. I understand thoroughly."

"It is nine o'clock now, Herbert. You had better go home and go to bed, and be bright and on deck for the morning. You should tell your mother what you are doing, so that in case you are kept out late, or are obliged to go out of the city, she will not be worried."

"Thank you, sir. I'll do that."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WIG-WAG SIGNALS.

Herbert Runter had not been gone from the house ten minutes before Nick Carter and Chick came in together. They went directly to the library, for Joseph told them that Patsy was at home and in that room.

The detective lighted a cigar and stretched himself in one of the most comfortable chairs. Then, with a smile, he said:

"Loosen up, Patsy. What is the history of your day?"

"This has been my busy day, all right," replied Patsy gravely. "I wish you'd sit down, too, Chick. I've got something on my mind, and I want to get it off. You ought to hear it as well as the chief."

"What is it, Patsy?" asked Nick Carter.

For reply, Patsy removed the folded evening paper from his pocket, where he had placed it, and indicating the two lines in capitals that had so moved him, passed the paper across to Nick.

"I've got a confession to make," he said, a trifle shamefacedly. "When I saw that ad it took me clean off my feet for a moment, I thought I would keep it from you, if you had not already seen it, but, of course, I wouldn't really have done that."

"Of course you would not. I know that. But I had seen it, nevertheless, Patsy. It refers to you, of course?"

"It could not refer to anybody else. Jasper Rube, and——"

"Who?"

"Look here, chief, that man who stood on the steps of the Mammoth House at the same time I was there this morning was Thomas Savage. I'm just as thoroughly convinced of that as I am that you are Nick Carter."

"But who is this Rube you are talking about?"

"The name under which he registered at the hotel. He registered there and took a room, but he has not seen the inside of it. He has not been back there, to be seen and recognized, since he rode away from there with his mother this morning. But he, or somebody has been there and taken away the satchel that he checked with the porter."

"All right. Now, what were you about to say when I interrupted you?"

"That Jasper Rube, otherwise Thomas Savage, and I, were the only persons who were standing upon or near those particular steps at ten o'clock this morning. Therefore he inserted that advertisement in the paper, and it was addressed to me; and it is because of the crime, and his own innocence of that crime, that he has done so."

"Oh, you think that, too, do you?"

"I am positive of it; as positive as one can be without knowing the actual facts."

"All right. The thing looks rather black against him; but that advertisement for you is a long mark in his favor. Do you want me, or Chick, to go with you in the morning?"

"No. If you don't object, I'd rather go there alone."

"As you please. Now, what else?"

"Ten minutes before you came in I sent away the messenger boy who carried a letter to Madam Savage, day before yesterday; the letter which was the reason for her trip downtown this morning."

"That is good work, Patsy. Do you know what was in the letter?"

"No. I haven't any idea as to that, unless I make a shrewd guess that it was some sort of a threat."

"I think that goes without saying," said Nick.

"And the credit of finding the messenger doesn't belong to me. Evans, the butler up at Savage's, took his name and number. All that I had to do was to telephone. But the boy is unusually bright. What he has told me has convinced me that the woman who met madam down at the hotel was working some sort of blackmail on her."

"Oh, I have thought that all along; but, if that is so, it practically eliminates the strange woman from being considered in connection with the murder. She wouldn't kill the goose that laid the golden egg, would she?"

"I don't know. I want to find that woman, if it is possible, and I have sent young Herbert Runter out to search for her."

"That's a good idea, too."

"By the way, chief, there were two sons, instead of one—twins," said Patsy. And then he began at the beginning, and related in sequence all that had occurred to him and all that he had gleaned in the way of information during the afternoon and evening.

He told of the two interviews with Evans; of the interview with Irene Savage; of his visit to the Mammoth House, and finally, gave a detailed account of the interview with the messenger boy, and all that the lad had told him.

"I have been spending most of the afternoon at the Wilton," said the detective, after Patsy had finished his story. "Not that I expected to find anything there, but I knew that the murder would be the principle topic of discussion at that hotel to-day; and it was."

"Did you pick up anything at all?" asked Patsy.

"Not much. My idea was that somebody would drift in who would remember having seen the man—Tom Savage—leave the cab and enter the hotel; also that there might be somebody around who would boast that he saw where the man went after he entered the hotel. Of course, such rumors are not at all reliable, but they are frequently of assistance."

"Well did——"

Nick interrupted him by laughing outright.

"Oh, yes, I got the rumors all right," he said. "I have heard no less than seven different descriptions of the man, not one of which was like yours. He ascended in the elevator, he went directly to the café, he passed immediately through the hotel and went out by the side street entrance, he met a tall stranger in the lobby with whom he conversed for a moment, and then disappeared, he returned at once to the cab and spoke

to the woman inside, after which he turned down Broadway; and the strange part of it is that he did all those things at the same moment. That shows how much one may rely upon gossip."

"Then there wasn't a soul there who remembered really to have seen Savage, at all?" Patsy asked.

"Yes; there was one. The hotel stenographer. A smart young woman she is, too."

"Did she tell you anything that was worth attention?"

"Yes; but not enough."

"What was it, chief?"

"Her desk is where she can see out on Broadway, at the front entrance to the hotel. She saw that particular cab drive up to the door, and noticed the man when he got out of it. Her description of him is the only one I heard that tallies with yours."

"Well?"

"If it was Tom Savage, when he got out of the cab, he paused and turned around to speak to his mother again, thrusting his head and shoulders in at the window to do so; and the girl says that he remained in that position as long as a minute or two. He might have committed the murder then, Patsy."

"He might have done so, but I don't believe he did."

"Well, when he did turn away, he walked rapidly into the hotel. The girl was attracted by him because he was handsome, and because she thought at once that he came from the West. She happens to be a Western girl herself."

"I see."

"She saw him pass the door of the little room where her desk stands. Not being busy at the time, she left her seat and strolled to the door, and then she saw him at the desk, making inquiries of the clerk. She says she saw the clerk shaking his head, as if in reply to some question, after which Savage—we'll take it for granted that he is Savage—went directly to the elevator. She did not see him again, and I cannot find anybody else who remembers to have seen him at all."

"What about the clerk at the desk?"

"Has no recollection of the incident."

"Chief—but what's the use? If he advertised in the paper for me he isn't there now."

"What were you about to ask, Patsy?"

"I was going to suggest that he might have been detained in some room in the hotel; kept there against his will, I mean. I forgot, for the moment, that he had put that ad in the paper, you see."

"Still, there is reason in what you say. Now, Chick, it's your turn."

"What have you been up to, Chick?" Patsy asked. He did not realize that he was taking the initiative in the case, and that Nick was permitting him to do it.

"I have spent the afternoon in visiting detective agencies throughout the city," said the first assistant, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Detective agencies! What the deuce——"

"I went to police headquarters, first; to the detective bureau. Oh, I won't guy you, Patsy. I have been trying to find out who it was that Madam Savage wig-wagged to through the window, after the blackmailing woman left her."

"Bully! Did you dig it up?"

"Yes, I found the man—at the detective bureau."

"Huh! Would he give up the information you wanted?"

"Yes; quite willingly. It was only what they call a short order."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Early this morning, before she left the house, Madam Savage telephoned to the agency and said that she wanted a man detailed to her use. Her message over the phone was like this:

"'I shall leave my home shortly after nine o'clock; I shall take a hired taxicab—one of the yellow cabs which I can procure around the corner; I shall drive to the Mammoth House, and intend to arrive there at precisely ten o'clock. I shall go into the hotel by the Broadway entrance. I want you to have your man standing at the corner of Vesey Street at that time, and when I turn about to pay the cab hire I will look in that direction. If the man tips his hat to me, holding a handkerchief in his hand as he does so, I will know that it is your man. I will drop my hand bag to the pavement, to let him know that I have recognized him, after which he will cross Vesey Street to the south side of it, and will stand there and watch the parlor window of the hotel until he discovers me there, if it takes all day. It is very necessary that you should send a man who understands wig-wag signaling, such as is in use in the navy and among yachtsmen. When I stand in the window I will wig-wag a message to him which he is implicitly to obey. Send your bill to me with his report.'"

"Is that all?" asked Patsy.

"Yes. That is all," replied Chick, with something very much like a grin.

"Well, didn't the chap tell you what happened after the wig-wagging was done?"

"Oh, yes. Nothing happened at all."

"Nothing? How was that?"

"The detective who was sent down there claims that he understands wig-wagging perfectly, but that he could not read any part of the message that Madam Savage sent to him in that manner. He waited outside for her to come out, and when she did so, accompanied by a gentleman, he endeavored to speak to her, but she frowned upon him and finally ordered him away; and that is all."

"Gee! Then she couldn't wig-wag after all!" exclaimed Patsy.

"Or that detective couldn't," commented Nick Carter.

"I don't believe what he told you, Chick," said Patsy hotly. "That chap simply refused to give up, that's all."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEETING AT THE STATION.

Five minutes before ten o'clock the following morning Patsy entered the Grand Central Station at Forty-second Street, from the Vanderbilt Avenue entrance.

He believed that he was entirely alone in going to meet the person who had advertised in the paper, although nothing had been said upon the subject since the brief reference to it the preceding evening, when he was detailing an account of his experiences to Nick Carter and Chick. Patsy had remarked at that time that he would prefer to see the affair out alone, and Nick had raised no objection.

As Patsy passed from the lobby into the great waiting room of the station, he paused for a moment near the flower stand and surveyed the scene before him.

Ten o'clock a. m. is one of the busiest hours of the day, and that happened to be one of the busiest days of the week. The immense room was thronged with people who darted hither and thither in every direction, reminding one of a colony of ants that has been disturbed by a ruthless boy.

He hesitated for a moment only, then moved onward the length of the room and paused directly in front of the news stand at which point the message in the paper had directed him to go.

After a moment he turned half about and glanced up at the clock, noting that it still was lacking two minutes to ten; and so he continued his inspection of the books and magazines that were displayed there.

Again he looked toward the clock, and when the hands of it pointed exactly at ten, he turned squarely about, and with his back toward the news stand, began to inspect each person who came within his range of vision.

But, although he looked closely at each man who by height or carriage bore any resemblance at all to the man he believed to be Tom Savage, he discovered no one whom he believed to be the man. Ten minutes dragged themselves slowly away, and Patsy began to think that the appointment was not to be kept after all.

It was a terrible disappointment to him, and the discouragement became greater while one, two, three, four more minutes passed.

The hands of the big clock indicated a quarter past ten, and Patsy had about given up hope, as he felt that his theory of the case was slowly being dumped into a heap of ruins, when he was startled by the sensation of a muscular hand clutching his right arm, and a masculine voice said into his ear, in a low tone:

"Just make it appear that you're mighty pleased to meet up with me, partner."

Patsy turned like a flash. He grasped by both arms the man who had spoken to him, and who was nearly a head taller than he, and exclaimed:

"Well, well, well, old chap! I certainly am glad to see you! I certainly am."

He had recognized the voice of the man he had heard in conversation with Madam Savage, twenty-four hours before that time; but when he turned and grasped that man by the arms, he very nearly loosed his hold upon him, so great was his surprise at the transformation that had been wrought in Tom Savage's personal appearance.

Yesterday Savage's hair and eyebrows had been almost black; now both were of a fiery red. Yesterday the man had been smoothly shaven; now there was a short red moustache on his upper lip, and a tuft of hair of the same hue partly concealed the deep dimple in his chin.

Yesterday the man had been carelessly dressed, and had worn a slouched hat that he kept well back upon his head; now he was garbed in the very latest fashion, ultra-correct in every way, and a silk hat made him appear taller than he really was.

Yesterday the man had worn no glasses, but now a pair of eyeglasses sat firmly upon his well-shaped nose and a short gold chain connected them with a hook that rested over one of his ears.

Patsy could see that it was a disguise, of course; but he had to confess to himself that if the man had walked past him in that waiting room he would not have noticed the fact that it was a disguise, at all, so perfectly had it been accomplished.

There was just enough of it, and not too much, which after all is the secret of perfect disguising. There is always danger of overdoing it, and therein lies the peril of its discovery.

As if to carry out the idea that he had just arrived by one of the incoming trains, Savage had a satchel with him which he had dropped to the floor of the station when he accosted the young detective. After Patsy's greeting he uttered a short laugh and recovered the grip, while he said:

"I don't suppose we need to remain here, do we, old man? Did you secure rooms for me somewhere? How are all the folks at home, anyhow? It seems an age since I went away. Where are you going to take me?"

"Four questions in a bunch," replied Patsy, smiling at the ready wit of his companion; a wit for which he felt there was no immediate need. "Come along. We'll get out of here, first, and then find out where we will go."

Now, Patsy had been thoughtful before he started out that morning to keep the appointment at the Grand Central Station. He had realized that no time should be lost until Tom Savage and he could talk together confidentially, and he knew of but one way to secure it quickly, and safely, without the danger of being overheard, or even noticed.

So he had ordered out one of Nick Carter's automobiles, with Danny under the wheel; and the car was waiting for him near the Vanderbilt Avenue entrance to the station.

No word was exchanged between them while Patsy led the way to the waiting car. As they entered it, Patsy said to Danny:

"You may drive up Fifth Avenue, Danny, and then rather slowly through the park, coming out again at the Eighth Avenue entrance, and thence home."

"Home?" asked Patsy's companion. "Where is that?"

"A place where I think you will be delighted to find yourself, where you will be entirely safe, and where we can get at the business that has brought us together."

"Hold on just a minute!" exclaimed Savage. "No, I didn't mean stop the car; it was only an expression that I made use of. But it strikes me that you are better posted about the reason for my advertisement in the paper than I supposed you to be."

"Perhaps I am," replied Patsy dryly; and then he added, with fairly assumed innocence: "It wouldn't be at all a bad idea if you should tell me exactly why you did deplete your bank account in order to make sure that I would see your ad."

"That's easy," was the quick reply. "I consider myself a fairly good judge of human nature, partner. I've had a lot of experience in that line, and I've learned my lesson. When you stood at the opposite end of the steps from me yesterday morning I sized you up when you weren't looking, and wrote you down as a good chap, well worth tying to. That was before—well, before anything happened to disturb my equanimity."

"I'm sure it was very kind of you."

"No, it wasn't. It was just plain judgment, made from experience. I am more than ever convinced now, that I made no mistake."

"If it is your habit to go off halfcocked in that manner, you'll be up against it for fair one of these days, my friend," remarked Patsy sententiously.

"Maybe so."

"Things happened yesterday," Patsy remarked, after a moment of pause.

"I should say they did."

"And you rode uptown with a woman who was——"

"Don't! Please don't, old man."

"All right; but how do you know that I'm not a detective, and that——"

"I must interrupt you again, sir. I don't know; and what is more, I don't care a hang, for whether you are a detective or not, you are a fair-minded man, and one who will listen to calm, clear reasoning. I can read that in your eyes. And, anyhow, I'm prepared, if the worst should happen. I've had you covered, through my coat pocket, since the moment I spoke to you in the station."

"Oh, I knew that," Patsy replied.

"Did you? Moreover, I'm called the quickest man in my State, with a gun."

"You won't have any use for it to-day."

"No; I think not," replied Savage, removing his hand from his pocket, and relaxing against the cushions of the seat. "You act as if you already knew who I am."

"I do," replied Patsy quietly.

"Who am I?"

"Tom Savage."

"Well—I'll—be—blowed! How did you know that?"

"Because, when I saw you yesterday, as you appeared then, you were an exact reproduction of a picture of your father which hangs on the wall in—in the

house that has long been your mother's home; because old Evans showed me a picture of you, that you had taken purposely for him just before you ran away; because of what you said in the letter you brought to your mother, when you tried to make her believe that you were Jasper Rube—that part of it which told about a man who insisted upon talking about your family every time he met you, out there in Montana."

Savage was staring at Patsy by now, too greatly surprised to speak, for a moment.

Presently he thrust out his right hand, palm upward, and exclaimed:

"Put it there, old chap! You're all right. I don't know your name as yet, but it doesn't make the slightest difference what it is, you're what I took you for. I didn't make any mistake in judgment that time, did I?"

"No; I don't think you did. My name is Patrick Garvan. You can call me Patsy, for short, and I'll call you Tom. I'll say, to start with, that I knew your mother, and honored her; that I have met your sister, Irene, and talked with her only yesterday about you. I'll say further that I have been working on this case of yours ever since it happened, and that from the very first I have not believed that you had anything to do with the crime."

Savage did not reply to this. Patsy saw that he was greatly moved; too much so to trust himself to speak at that moment—and why should he not have been so?

To brighten him up a bit and take his thoughts away from his murdered mother, Patsy abruptly changed the subject.

"Where did you acquire the art of disguise?" he asked. "You have accomplished it so perfectly that I swear I wouldn't have known you if you had merely passed by me."

"Oh, I didn't do it. I had it done for me. I spent nearly the entire day, yesterday, at a French hairdresser's, in Thirty-third Street."

"How did you know that he wouldn't give you away?"

"I made it worth his while not to do so. I gave him a hundred dollars for what he did, and I promised him that if nothing happened to me in the meantime, I would return there one month later and give him another hundred. I reckoned that a month would see me out of the affair, all right," was the cool reply. "He boiled and stewed my head, bleached my hair and eyebrows, and—well, you see the result of what he did to me."

"Yes. Now, why did you send for me?"

"Because I had the hunch that you could and would help me. My hunches are generally to be relied upon, too. Besides, I had not a single friend in the city. Again, I felt that you knew more about the facts that preceded the—the crime, than any other person, save myself."

"That was a bad break of yours, Tom Savage, disappearing as you did, at the Wilton."

"A bad break? Say, do you suppose I did that purposely? I guess not, old timer!"

"Then what did happen to keep you from returning to the taxicab, at the Wilton?"

"A thump on the back of my head, happened; a dose of chloroform in my nostrils, happened; and something else must have happened that I don't know about, to prevent the finishing of the job, or I'd be cold meat, right now."

CHAPTER X.

A REMARKABLE EXPERIENCE.

"Wait a minute," said Patsy. "Let me tell you what I know, and then you go ahead with your story. That will be the best way of putting me wise to just what did happen."

"All right. Fire away, Patsy. You told me to call you that, you know."

"Precisely; and I meant it, too. When you got out of the cab in front of the Wilton, you put your head in at the window and talked with your mother for a minute or more; then——"

"Say! Look here! Did you trail me from that other hotel, to the Wilton?"

"No. What I am telling you now I found out later."

"All right. Go on; but it beats me how you have kept tabs on me so well."

"You will understand it presently."

"I hope so."

"You put your head and shoulders in at the window of the cab and conversed with your mother for a minute or two; then you entered the hotel and went straight to the desk where you asked some questions of the clerk, that I don't know about. He shook his head, but you insisted, and finally went to the elevator. Nothing was seen of you after that."

"That's correct."

"Now, was your mother all right when you left her to enter the hotel?"

"Perfectly so."

"Do you know if she had any sort of weapon with her, or is it possible that she took her own life? Of course the weapon was missing, but——"

"No; my mother did not take her own life. She would not do that under any circumstances. She was murdered, deliberately—and by a woman, I honestly believe."

"Did you enter that hotel on an errand for her, or was it your own affair that took you there?"

"It was my own incentive that took me there, much against my mother's wishes; but it was on business for her, that I knew nothing about until after I entered the cab with her, in front of the hotel downtown."

"Then you had made yourself known to her?"

"It wasn't necessary. She recognized me the instant she saw me, from my likeness to my father, but she chose to disguise the fact until we were safely inside the cab. Then—then——. Oh, it is awful when I think of what has happened! Then she put her arms around me, and cried over me, and we acted like a couple of young lovers half the way uptown."

"I can well believe that, Tom."

"You see, if I had been willing to listen to her; if I had not insisted upon going to the Wilton and taking matters into my own hands, she would be alive right now. That is where I blame myself so terribly."

"You must try to forget that part of it. Your mother received a letter three days ago, and it was that letter which took her to the Mammoth House parlor. Do you know what that letter contained?"

"Yes. She showed it to me. I read it. It was in my pocket, with other things, when I was struck down in the Wilton. Of course, it was taken from me, with the other things; but I can give you the substance of it."

"It was a blackmailing letter?"

"Yes; demanding fifteen hundred dollars."

"Which she was foolish enough to pay?"

"Not on your life. Mother wasn't that kind. The sealed envelope that she gave to the woman who met her down there contained no money at all; nothing but blank paper cut into the size and shape of bills. She had a detective outside upon whom she depended to trail——"

"Yes; I know about that, too. She wig-wagged to him."

"Well, mother relied upon him to catch that woman, but he failed her. She told me about it in the cab. She knew that the woman was stopping at the Wilton, because, while driving past there the preceding day, she had seen her coming out of it. When she told me all that had happened, and what they were trying to do to her, I insisted upon going directly to the Wilton and having it out with the bunch. I called to our driver and ordered him to take us there—and did it against my mother's wishes. I knew that when the woman opened that envelope and discovered that she had been hoaxed, she'd be madder than a wet hen, and I figured out that it would be a good time to meet up with her, as they say in my country."

"Go on. Tell me the rest. Drive more slowly, Danny."

"You see, we both—my mother and I—knew the identity of the woman; that is, we knew who she used to be. When I entered the Wilton I asked for her under the name that is rightfully her own, or was once. The clerk at the desk did not know any such person. While I was questioning him, I also was looking over the register. I found there an entry of two names that have been familiar to me in the West of late years, and I jumped at the conclusion that she and her husband were passing under those names. Moreover, the rooms they occupied were side by side. It was one of my hunches that I told you about."

"I understand."

"I went to the elevator and ascended to those rooms; but not being familiar with the hotel I got out at the wrong floor and was obliged to walk half the length of the corridor and go up one flight of stairs before I found the rooms I wanted."

"The idea is, I suppose, that one or both of the parties you mention, must have seen you stop at the hotel, or enter it, or might have heard you making the inquiries at the desk, and so beat you to the rooms."

"Exactly. Anyhow, somebody was waiting for me when I got there. The door to one of the rooms stood invitingly open. I rapped upon the casing beside it. I could see no person inside the room. Somebody called out: 'Come in.' I stepped inside the door, and as I did so, got a rap on the back of my head that sent me to the floor. Before I could do a thing to recover myself—I fell face downward—two persons jumped onto me, and a towel that reeked of chloroform was tied over my nose and mouth. I struggled, but it was no use. Then I lost consciousness."

"Go on. You are getting to be mighty interesting."

"I was rather dazed when I came around. There was a sharp pain in my side, too. I staggered to my feet and found this thing protruding from my waistcoat."

From an inside pocket Savage produced an article that had been carefully wrapped in tissue paper. He removed the wrappings and disclosed to Patsy's view a long, slender, steel weapon, at least eight inches in width, although the blade of it was no wider than the blade of a penknife. It was at once evident to Patsy that it was the same sort of weapon that had been used in the slaying of Madam Savage.

"I don't know why they left it with me," said Savage, "unless they were frightened away before they were quite through with me, or forgot it."

He wound it again in the tissue paper and returned it to his pocket. Then he went on:

"As I have said, I was rather dazed. I didn't know how badly I was hurt; but I knew that I had been stabbed. I also knew that my pockets had been stripped of everything of value they contained—in fact, literally of everything, even to letters and papers.

"I could see, too, that the room had been hastily abandoned. Either they were already packed up, ready to leave when I entered the room, or they got their things hurriedly together and lit out while I was there. I think that then they believed they had killed me.

"The door was locked upon me, but there was a key in one of the closet doors which served, and after I had pulled myself together a bit, I went out."

"What about the wound? Didn't it bleed?"

"Bleed? I should say it did, notwithstanding the fact that I left the dagger where it was, because I was afraid to draw it out. I wanted to get back to mother. I didn't know how long a time I had been in that room, but I knew it must have been a long time."

"Do you mean that you walked out of that room with the dagger still sticking into you?"

"Sure. You see, the wound proved to be merely a scratch. It's as sore as blazes now, but nothing more. I was nauseated by the chloroform, and felt very badly. When I left the room I held one hand over the hilt of the dagger to conceal it from view. I didn't want to be bothered by making explanations, and I did want to return to my mother.

"Fortunately there was no other passenger in the elevator, and the boy who ran it took no notice of me. I left it at the ground floor, and went directly to the bar. I was weak and miserable, and I seated myself at a table and ordered that a bottle of brandy be brought to me. It was after I had taken a large dose of it that I began to notice what was going on around me, and heard what was being talked about. You can guess what that was."

"Yes."

"The shock was so terrible that I think I must have lost consciousness for a moment or two, but I did not fall. I sat there at that table, and listened while I drank brandy, until I heard the whole terrible story; until I knew that my mother had been murdered, and that the man who had been with her—I—was believed to be the guilty one.

"I could see where there was no possible escape for me if I was taken then. The very wound that I had myself, and which I was nursing at the moment, would be added proof against me, for it would be said that I had tried to kill myself also, and had then thought better of it. The conversation to which I listened told me that my mother had been stabbed in the same way that I had, and with a weapon not unlike this one. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"I learned, too, that I must have been unconscious in that room a long time, for already my mother's body had been taken away. I tried to think what was best to do. I now believe that I acted throughout that ordeal subconsciously."

"No doubt of it. Do you mean to tell me that all the time they were searching that hotel for a trace of you, you sat at a table in the café?"

"No; not all the time. Part of the time, and probably during the most strenuous part of the search, I was unconscious in the room upstairs. Doubtless the searchers had been through the café half a dozen times before I got there."

"What did you do, then?"

"I longed for a friend, but I had not one in all the city. Then I remembered you. I liked your face and manner when I saw you in the morning, and I decided to think out some way of communicating with you."

"But your own wound, man?"

"Oh, as I said, it wasn't really very bad; only a scratch. The brandy had strengthened me. I left the hotel by the café entrance. I walked westward, took a downtown car somewhere, and finally found a hotel in West Street. I secured a room, stripped, dressed my own wound——"

"But, you didn't have any money. You had been robbed."

"I had three thousand dollars sewed inside the lining of my vest. I tore up one of the sheets in that room to dress my wound, went out and got some clean clothes, for mine were bloody, you know, returned to

the room and dressed again, took some more brandy. After paying my bill and giving them a little extra for the sheet I had destroyed, I went to the business office of an evening paper and bought the right to have that advertisement inserted."

"You're a wonder!" said Patsy, with admiration.

"No; I figured it out that you were about the only person in New York who had a fair description of me, and that, as yet, you would not have associated me with the murder. Anyhow, I took the chance. And that is all, up to date."

"You are convinced, of course, that the same persons who attempted to kill you, committed the other crime. Do you know who they are?"

"No. I know who they used to be, but that is all. I did not see either of them in that room at the Wilton. I saw the woman, only as you saw her, downtown."

CHAPTER XI.

THE KNIFE THROWER.

"Now, tell me what was in that letter that was sent to your mother by messenger, and which took her downtown at the time you encountered her," said Patsy.

"It is a long story, really, but I can condense it into a few sentences. My mother was formerly a beautiful woman. She loved admiration. My father, while the kindest of men, was inordinately jealous. The consequence was that they had frequent quarrels. There was a man in their set, when I was a child, whose name was Albert Stowell, and he was the chief cause of their dissensions. Albert Stowell did, on one occasion—this my mother told me yesterday—make desperate love to her, and by a trick he forced her into a compromising position, in which, while she was not at fault, it would have been difficult to explain. In a word, he was a genuine scoundrel, and he accepted money from my mother on the condition of his keeping silence.

"Once she began to pay she had to continue to do so. There was another thing, too. The death of my father was brought about directly by the temper of my mother. She struck the horse he was riding, and it bolted and threw him.

"Then there was the terrible thing that happened to my brother, which resulted in driving me away from home when I was sixteen.

"Now, Albert Stowell married an unprincipled woman, named Marie Golden. Together they made out a case against my mother which frightened her into a funk, and she paid, paid, paid. They threatened constantly to publish, not only the story of that old affair with Stowell, but also that my mother had caused my father's death, and that she had induced me, her son, to kill my brother. You see how they could work upon her. All this, mind you, I did not know till yesterday.

"The letter was a demand made by Albert Stowell upon my mother for fifteen hundred dollars to be paid at once. It directed her where to meet Marie Stowell, and to give her the money in a sealed envelope. Mother had not failed them before, and they did not think that she would do it this time. There was no name signed to the letter, of course, but mother understood perfectly well who it was from.

"Personally, I never knew the Stowells; I was too young. Now, try to follow me, for right here is where the thing gets mixed. Mother told me in the cab, yesterday, that the woman who came after the money was not Marie Stowell; that she was a much younger woman, who, although heavily veiled, still showed that she was young; as young as I am, or younger.

"Albert Stowell should be about sixty-three by now; his wife would be only a few years younger. Mother did not know where they have lived of late years; she knew only that regularly, twice every year, they appeared on the scene and demanded large amounts of money, which she invariably paid—until yesterday.

"In Montana, where I have been living, there is a man who calls himself Alfred Starbuck, who answers to the description of Stowell given me by my mother. He has always had unkind things to say about my people, especially when he was in my presence; but he used so many other names that I did not think that he was talking at me. I now believe the man was Stowell, and that all the time he knew who I was. My resemblance to my father would have told him that.

"One day I horsewhipped him. His son, five years younger than I, although he looks even older, for he is dissipated, came over to my ranch to kill me; instead, I shot him through the thigh—at least, I was told that I did. Now I think that he was no more than scratched, and that it was he and his half-breed French and Indian wife who were at that hotel, who attempted to kill me, and who, a few minutes later, did kill my mother."

"What were the names that you saw on the register that attracted your attention?" Patsy asked him.

"Paul Lefevre—that was the name of the man with whom the wife of Ransom Starbuck lived before she married him; he was her uncle, I believe—and Yvonne Dupont. That was her name before she married him. Ransom Starbuck is the fellow I thought I shot."

"You evidently guessed right about them when you saw those names."

"It was as plain to me as the nose on your face," replied Savage, with conviction.

"But what is the game? Why did they try to commit two murders, and succeed in committing one?"

"Let me tell you what I had in my pockets, that was taken from me while I was unconscious in that hotel room. That may answer the question."

"Well?"

"Mind you, I had been away seventeen years. When I went away from home I took with me a lot of photographs, letters, and other things, that would prove my identity if the occasion should arise. When I started east a week or more ago I brought all that stuff with me. You see, I did not know how I would be received. I was not sure that my mother would recognize me. I wanted to be in a position to prove who I was—who I am. Now, my mother was a very rich woman. Her fortune goes into the millions. Do you read anything from that?"

"Do you mean—— Why, certainly. It was the game of this Ransom Starbuck, whose name is really Stowell, to impersonate you; to try to impose upon your mother, and if that could not be done, then to assassinate her, and step forward as heir to the fortune. It's as plain as a pikestaff."

"Sure thing. At least that is the way I read it. Now——"

"Wait, Tom. They, of course, had no idea that you had come to New York, but when the woman, Starbuck's wife, saw you in the hotel parlor, while she talked with your mother, she recognized you. That was why she left so suddenly when she thought she had the money."

"Precisely."

"One of them, or somebody who is here with them, overheard your conversation with the man at the desk in the Wilton, and when you found their rooms they were ready for you."

"That's the idea."

"It came to them in a flash how they could carry off the whole scheme. They were taking desperate chances, but they saw a loophole out, by leaving you dead in that room, unknown. But, that other crime, man? Your mother!"

"Mr. Garvan, if you knew that woman whom Ransom Starbuck married, you would not need to ask the question. She used to give exhibitions of knife throwing. I have seen her do wonderful feats of that kind. She could pierce in the very centre, a piece of paper an inch square, from a distance of thirty feet. I have seen her do it. The window of the cab in which my mother was seated waiting for me, was down. It was open."

"But, if she threw the dagger with which your mother was slain, the weapon would have remained in the wound," objected Patsy.

"Listen to me a moment," Savage replied to him. "At one of her exhibitions, before she was married, she performed a feat which I have never seen equalled. She announced that she would throw a knife through a hole in a screen she had among her scenery, and kill an imprisoned jack rabbit in a barred cage, just beyond the hole. She stood twenty feet away from the screen. The hole through it wasn't more than a foot square. The rabbit cage was made with wires that were not more than two inches apart. She claimed that after the deed was done we would not be able to find the weapon with which it had been done. She ordered the spectators to turn their backs for an instant. She did not move from her tracks.

"You might have counted five before she directed us to turn around again, and inspect the rabbit. It was dead; it had been stabbed; there was no weapon in sight, nor could we find one. She laughed at us and told us to beware how we treated her. Afterward I saw that dagger. It had a hollow handle inside of which a cord was fastened to a roller. She could throw the knife or dagger straight, without whirling it, and after the wound was inflicted, she could jerk it back again into her own hand like a flash. And that is what she did that day. I firmly believe it is what she did yesterday."*

"You mean that her skill is so great that she could have walked past the open window of the cab, so far away from it that nobody would suspect her of going near it, and throw her dagger through the window, and then recover it and move on, without attracting the attention of persons near her. Is that it?"

"Yes. I have seen her throw a knife, unerringly, thirty feet or more, with only a movement of her forearm. I think that is the real solution of the mystery."

"Then, Savage, it is up to us to find the woman."

*I have personally seen this very feat performed, many times, in Mexico. C. C.

"And the man. Don't forget him."

"He won't be forgotten. And now, here we are at the place where I was taking you."

"Where is it? Whose house is it? Yours?"

"No. It is the residence of Nick Carter, the detective, and I have the honor to be his assistant," replied Patsy, as he leaped to the pavement.

"Gee-whiz! You don't say so. Well, I was in luck when I saw you standing down there on the hotel steps. So you're Patsy, eh? I've heard about you. Well, well, well! And that accounts for your being so mighty well posted about this affair, even before I told you my part of it."

"Yes. I have been working on it—we all have, in fact—ever since it happened. Come in. We will try and arrange so that you can see your sister sometime this afternoon."

"While I look like this? With all this red business?"

"Perhaps that can be remedied. We will see about that."

Joseph, at the door, informed Patsy that Mr. Carter and Mr. Chick were in the study, and so Patsy took matters in his own hands and led his guest directly to that sacred room, wherein few strangers were permitted to penetrate.

In as few words as possible Patsy related the substance of what had occurred that morning, and then, leaving Tom Savage to tell his own story to Nick and Chick, he went to his room.

He had been there scarcely a moment when the house telephone rang, and over it Joseph informed him that there was a telegram just arrived for him.

Remembering Herbert Runter, and the assignment that had been given him, Patsy got his hat and ran down the stairs. He seized the telegram, tore it open, and read:

"Come instantly to Hotel Sanglien, Forty-fourth Street. Moments delay may be too late."

It was signed "Runt."

For the fraction of a second Patsy hesitated, but that closing sentence in the message determined him. Without a word he dashed out of the house and up the avenue, with all the speed he could muster.

At the corner of the next street an automobile—a private car—was passing. It held only one occupant, evidently its owner, and to him Patsy called out.

"A great favor, please," he panted, at the same time leaping into the seat beside the driver without ceremony. "A matter of life and death. Please take me to the Hotel Sanglien, in Forty-fourth Street. I'm Nick Carter's assistant."

"You're on," said the man at the wheel, and he turned the car up the avenue without another word; and then he let her out all he dared, so that she bowled along swiftly.

"What's doing?" the man at the wheel asked him.

"I expect that a murderer, or two of them, are escaping," Patsy replied.

"Maybe you'll need my assistance; eh? You seem to be alone. I haven't had a scrap in a long time, and I'd like one that would liven me up a bit. Which assistant are you; eh?"

"I'm Patsy."

"Are you? Good. I've heard about you. I'll stand by you and see this thing through, too."

"Thank you," was all that Patsy said. Then they turned the corner into Forty-fourth Street.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE.

The "Sanglien" is one of the later apartment hotels, narrow and deep and high. A corrugated iron and glass awning covers its approach from the street curb.

As Patsy and his companion drew near to it they could see that a big limousine car was standing in front, and that a man near it was giving directions to the chauffeur. Even as they discovered him, he sprang inside and disappeared, and the car started rapidly through the street toward Broadway.

Patsy discovered another thing, too, and that was a boy standing near the spot where the car had been, dressed in the uniform of the messenger service. He had not a doubt that it was Runtie, and in a moment more he was sure of it.

Runtie's sharp eyes had discovered the approach of Patsy in the car, and he ran forward, swinging his arms and shouting something that Patsy could not hear.

Patsy thanked his stars that he had not stopped to tell Nick Carter of the message, for then he might have been too late. The instant he saw Runtie, and observed the lad running toward him, he sensed the truth; that the persons he was after were inside the car that had just left the front of the hotel.

"It is that limousine that we want," he said to his companion; "but hold up just enough so that the messenger boy can climb in with us."

"All right."

"You said that you would help me out, and now I begin to think you'll have to."

"I'll see you through. Don't you fret," was the hearty reply, even as he slowed the machine so that Runtie could swing himself into the car.

The instant the boy was safe, the driver of the car opened her up a notch or two, and it shot forward with greatly increased speed. The other car had already reached the corner and turned northward.

"Don't lose it, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Patsy; and then: "Are they in that car, Herbert?"

"Sure thing. I don't know where they're bound for, either, that's the trouble. Oh, I certainly was afraid that you would not get here in time."

"Are you sure about the identification, Herbert?"

"Betcher life I am! It was the woman who spoke to me, just as you thought she would."

"Where, and when? Tell me about it. Ah, Mr.—won't you tell me your name?"

"Perkins. Jack Perkins."

"There is the limousine just ahead of us."

"I see it; but there are forty others between them and us, and—say, why don't you jump out and take them, before the cops lets them start on again?"

"Too risky. Too much of a crush here. They might start on before I could get to them, and we would lose time. There they go now."

"Right you are; and here's after them."

"Now, Herbert, tell me your story," said Patsy.

"I went home to see mother and tell her about it, as you told me to do."

"That was right."

"But I didn't stay there. I wanted to be on the job. I thought at first that I'd go to bed, but it wasn't any use, and so about eleven o'clock I lighted out."

"Well, go on."

"First off I went to the Wilton. You see, although I am a boy, this uniform lets me go almost anywhere at any hour."

"Yes. I know."

"Well, I couldn't get any scent of the woman around there, and I didn't stay more'n ten or fifteen minutes. When I came out, the Metropolitan Opera House was just letting out, and I stood around watching the people."

"That wasn't a bad idea, Herbert."

"Pretty soon out comes a pair—a man and a woman, both dressed to kill—and as they crossed the walk toward a carriage, what does the woman do but put her hand up to her hair the same way I told you about. Remember?"

"Yes. Mr. Perkins, they are turning again."

"I see them. You pay attention to the kid. I will attend to this part of it. I'm not good for much except spending money, but I can drive a car, and don't you neglect that fact."

"All right. I will leave it to you. Now, Herbert?"

"Well, I looked for the chain and locket, to make sure, but she didn't have it on, or else I couldn't see it; but she put up her hand again just before she got into the carriage, and I felt certain that I was right. And say!"

"Well?"

"She wasn't wearing any veil that time—and she's a peach. She's about ten dreams chucked into one, she is."

"Never mind that. Go on."

"That's part of the story. I never saw such a pair of eyes in anybody's head before. They just burned and blazed."

"Did she see you?"

"Not on your life. Not then. I wasn't ready for that—yet."

"Well?"

"I had the run of my life, Mr. Garvan, to keep that carriage in sight. It was a good thing that it didn't have far to go. It stopped at a restaurant, and the two of them went inside and stayed there a solid hour, eating things."

"You waited for them, of course?"

"Betcher life I waited for 'em. When they came out they rode around to the Sanglien Hotel and went inside. I'd have notified you then, only I wasn't sure, you see; and I wanted to be dead certain. It was up to me not to put you on a wrong scent; see?"

"Yes."

"Well, this morning I hung around the front of the Sanglien, and about half-past ten who should walk out of it but her nibs? The man wasn't with her. I saw her coming, and managed to plant myself so that she couldn't help seeing me. She wore a veil this time, same's she did yesterday."

"She recognized you?"

"She spied me, and came to a full stop. Then she spoke to me. 'Are you the boy who carried a message for me yesterday?' she asked, so sweet that it tasted like sugar.

"'Dunno,' I said.

"'You weren't looking for me, were you?' she asked me, then.

"'No, ma'am,' says I.

"'Come into the hotel with me a moment,' she says. 'I've got another errand for you to do, and I will pay you better for it then I did yesterday.'

"Well, she turned around and went back to the hotel, and like a fool I followed her. She took me into the elevator, and then into a room where that man who was with her last night was smoking a cigar. She said something to him in a language that I didn't understand, and he turned and gave me a look that scared me. Then he got up, and grabbed me, and the woman tied a towel around my head, over my nose and mouth—but I smelled what it was, and held my breath until I near busted open."

"Chloroform?" said Patsy.

"Sure. I got some of it, too. Enough to make me dream, but I guess it didn't last long. I heard them talking after a little, but in that heathenish language that I couldn't understand. I was on the bed in the next room to them, but I wasn't tied. I knew from what they were doing that they were going away somewhere.

"Well, after a little they both went out of the room, and then I didn't lose no time—not very much—in getting out of that room and down the stairs. It was then that I sent the telegram to you."

"What did you do then?"

"I wrote a note to leave there for you in case I had to go away, to follow them; but you got there in time. I don't think they saw me when they came out and got into the car. They were in too much of a hurry. And then I saw you coming; and that's all."

"Splendid, Herbert, splendid! You shall be well paid for this, and your mother shall go into the country without any expense to either of you."

Perkins interrupted the conversation before Herbert could express his thanks.

"They are entering the park," he said. "Eighth Avenue entrance, this is. Shall I risk the speed laws and the coppers now, and overtake them, Garvan?"

"By all means."

"Then here goes. I can do seventy an hour with this car."

"Do it now, then. Catch them as quickly as possible, and manage to stop them, somehow."

"I can do that. You watch."

Perkins drove the car ahead at a frightful speed, for a short distance. He passed the other car, shot around it until he was directly in front of it, and then deliberately slowed down, as if inviting the car behind to run into him; and he kept on slowing, compelling the other car to do the same until they were moving slowly enough to that Patsy dared to leap out upon the roadway.

"You halt!" he ordered the chauffeur of the other car, and he emphasized his words by pulling one of his guns. But he did not have to do more than show it, for the man under the wheel was already frightened by what was taking place. He brought the car to a full stop.

As he did so, something shot past Patsy's cheek, and he heard Perkins, who was behind him, utter an exclamation of pain. He knew that it was one of those terrible daggers that the woman could throw so dexterously, and he leaped forward to the door of the car and tore it open.

As he did so the woman, who was seated nearest to him, thrust herself forward with all the fury of a wildcat, but he seized her and dragged her outside without ceremony, pinioning her arms behind her and holding her so. Then the man leaped out, but he tried to run away; and he might have succeeded but for the long right arm of Perkins which seized upon him and threw him to the ground.

Patsy had two pairs of handcuffs in his pockets, and they were quickly in use. Five minutes later both cars were driving back again toward Nick Carter's house, for Patsy had determined to take his prisoners there before delivering them over to the authorities.

And that is the end of this story.

It is true that there was only circumstantial evidence against the prisoners, but it was rather strong evidence at that. The slight wound that Perkins received in the fleshy part of his left arm was almost sufficient evidence in itself. If it had not been for the sudden stopping of the car in which she was seated, that thrown dagger would have found Patsy's throat, instead of grazing his cheek.

THE END.

Nick Carter, in all his astonishing experiences, has never run up against such a fiendish character as the one he starts to put on the blink in the next story. The great detective and his keen young assistants are more than equal to the difficulties which beset them. They follow the trail with gusto from one dangerous and exciting point to another toward its surprising end. It is a corking good story, and will keep you going from start to finish. It is called "The Knife Thrower; or, Nick Carter's Tragic Case." Don't fail to get a copy. The number is 715. Out next week.

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NEW YORK, September 3, 1910.

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THE LIGHTNING EXPRESS.

Did the reader ever ride on a locomotive at top speed? It is a queer experience, especially to one not at all accustomed to that peculiar mode of traveling, and is calculated, under some circumstances, to try the nervous system to its utmost tension. If you would realize the power and irresistible force of a locomotive under headway, step on the rails for a moment, on a dark night, and look up the long line of perspective at an on-coming engine with its blazing signal lantern in front, like the eye of Cyclops, and its roar, echoed by the trembling earth, like some fabled giant's breath. It is the very epitome of mechanical power harnessed to the service of human intelligence. What a frightful means of sacrifice, what a marvelous agent for good!

Again, stand on the platform of a side station while the express train passes at its average speed of thirty miles an hour, and you have another example of the amazing power of steam. Your nerves will involuntarily contract themselves as the train rushes swiftly by, your eardrums will close mechanically, and you almost gasp for breath as the air-vacuum surrounds you, caused by such huge and rapid atmospheric displacement.

But it was upon an engine itself that the experience of which we write was gained, and, though some years have now intervened, it is as fresh in the memory as though it had occurred but yesterday.

It was on a cold winter evening that we were to start from Burlington, Vermont, for Boston. The January thaw had failed to put in an appearance that year, and the cold in that northern region had been intense, bedding the frost to a great depth in the soil. After purchasing our ticket for the lightning express, as it was called, and placing valise and wrapper safely in one of the passenger cars, we had strolled about the depot, until we finally paused beside the large and powerful locomotive which was to draw the train on its downward trip. It was a superb piece of mechanism, with its brass mountings as bright as patent foil and incessant care could make them, while the iron and steel parts conveyed a sense of enormous strength even at a glance. The huge engine seemed almost endowed with animal life as it paused there with restrained power, like a thoroughbred horse champing impatiently at the bit which curbs him. The engineer and fireman were both in their places quietly awaiting the signal which should start the train for the South. A sudden thought struck me. I had never ridden upon a locomotive; it would be a new sensation. Was it possible to do so to-night? I asked the engineer, who shook his head, but still answered me pleasantly:

"There is the superintendent yonder; ask him."

Seeking the individual designated as the superintendent, I was both pleased and surprised to recognize in him an old friend with whom, years ago, I had been on intimate terms. I finally told him that I had a singular request to make, and expressed my desire to ride with the engineer. He somewhat reluctantly assented to my desire, but not without numerous cautions, and the remark that it was quite exceptional to grant such a privilege to any one.

Walking to the side of the locomotive, the superintendent introduced me to the engineer, and gave him directions to accommodate me as it regarded the intended purpose.

Five minutes later the signal bell was rung, the shrill whistle sounded, steam was gradually let on to the cylinders, and the train rolled out of the depot into the darkness, which, for a moment, was rendered more dense by contrast with the well-lighted depot left behind. I at once bestowed myself so as not to be in the way of the engineer or fireman, and curiously watched the novel scene immediately about me, for that was all that I could possibly see.

"Never on a locomotive before?" suggested the engineer.

"No."

"Can't see much such a night as this."

"No; it's as dark as a pocket," I replied.

"Of a nice summer's day it's all very well," continued the engineer, "but of a dark night—well, I don't think it's very jolly."

All the while he was looking straight ahead, with his hands on the valves to shut off steam and to whistle "down brakes" at an instant's notice.

"How far ahead can you see?" I asked.

"About a couple of rods such a night as this, unless a strong signal lantern is shown, then we can see farther."

"Two rods would be of no real advantage, if we were to encounter an obstacle on the track," I suggested.

"Well, no; you can't stop an express train much inside of a quarter of a mile with the style of brakes we now have."

"Aye, that's it. You require a more powerful sort of brake; is that what I understand you to mean?"

"Exactly; one that will act with greater power, and yet not bring a train up all standing, as it were. That would be almost as bad as to run into an object dead ahead," replied the engineer.

"Something of the sort will be invented."

"Oh, yes; one of these days, I've always said so."

In the meantime the lightning express was rushing on its way, straight into the intense darkness, which, if possible, was now rendered more apparent by a fleecy fall of snow, which was packed all about us by reason of the great speed at which we were running. I could not but admire the perfect coolness of the two men who were my companions, though my own senses were in a constant state of nervous excitement. The intense darkness, the blinding snow into which we drove, as it seemed to me, not knowing whither, kept my senses on the alert. I could not divest myself of the feeling that there was, perhaps, something in that darkness just ahead, which we were sure to run into and wreck the train. Finally my excited brain began to recall all the railroad accidents of which I had ever read or heard, until, as I had just arrived at the height of miserable anticipation, I suddenly exclaimed:

"What is that?" on hearing something like a prolonged whistle ahead.

"Your ears are quick," said the engineer calmly. "That is the Rutland accommodation train; it will pass us in a moment."

Even while he was speaking there appeared in front of us the bright, reflecting signal lantern upon the other engine, seeming exactly in front of us, and, perhaps, six or eight rods distant; but scarcely had the eye settled upon the daz-

zling object before it swept past us on the other track so quickly as to seem to have been a flash of lightning, and, for an instant, quite taking away my breath, though my companions did not so much as wink an eyelid. In this instance we had not only the thirty miles per hour headway of our own train, but also the twenty miles per hour of the accommodation train added to the speed which so rapidly separated us. It was not a very pleasant thought which passed through my brain just then, that a misplaced switch might bring these two trains upon the same track facing each other, and, at this frightful rate of speed, the result can easily be conceived.

Frank Moore, the engineer, had been long in the company's service. He was a man of some thirty-eight or forty years, intelligent, though not cultivated, and as I watched him standing at his post, that dark and dismal night, I thought how many lives were trusted to his sole guidance. Supposing an accident were to happen to him, what would become of a hundred souls and more in the train? But he stood there as firm as the iron about him, never for one moment quitting his hold upon either the valve which should signal danger, or that which shut off the motive power in case of necessity. Begrimed, by long experience to soot and smoke, his features were very dark, but there was a kindly expression through all the bronze, and a firmness visible in his face which challenged trust and entire confidence in the man.

We had stopped twice for wood and water, at which times I might have taken my seat in the passenger cars, but a wild fascination seemed to attach me to the locomotive, and I determined to continue upon it at least for a while longer. And so on we dashed, still through the dense darkness and the blinding snow, as we had been doing for so many a long mile. Now and then the engine would jump in its fierce headway on striking some trifling obstruction upon the rails, and my heart would leap into almost audible action, and to me it appeared, at times, as though the whole train was going over an embankment to inevitable wreck. When one of these experiences was more decided than usual, I could not quite suppress an ejaculation, at which my companions would glance at me with an amused smile. Custom had inured them to these occurrences, so that they gave them no heed.

On, on, and still the driving snowstorm and the darkness reigned supreme. The stoker fed the fire, and the engineer, watchful as ever, peered ahead. I was, perhaps, getting to be a little sleepy from the force of the wind and the lateness of the hour, for it was now about midnight, when, fearing to drop to sleep, I rose from a stool on which I had been sitting, and determined to change to the passenger cars at the next stopping place. Just as I had made this mental resolve, there came suddenly a crash at the front window of the engine that sent every drop of blood back to my heart with a sickening thrill. I had time to draw one long breath, when the engineer whistled "down brakes," and shut off steam from the engine, exclaiming:

"My God! what is that?" while both he and myself shook the broken glass from our faces and necks, and he still further reversed his engine.

"It's a lantern," said the fireman, picking up what remained of the article, which had come crashing in at the window.

"Thrown at us," said the engineer. "That means danger, if it means anything."

In the meantime the train had been brought to a standstill, the conductor had appeared at the side of the locomotive to consult with the engineer, the bell was rung, whistle started, and gradually we ran backward toward the spot where the lantern had struck us. We had retraced our way for nearly a quarter of a mile, when a man suddenly appeared through the darkness and came to the locomotive.

"Did you throw that lantern?" asked the engineer.

"To be sure I did, and worse luck if I hadn't hit ye!" was the answer that came to our ears with unmistakable Milesian accent.

"Who are you?" asked the conductor.

"I'm trackman between here and Brandon."

"Well, what's the matter?" asked the engineer.

"The matter is a broken rail, just beyant, as would have sent ye all to glory!" replied the Irishman.

The affair was soon explained. During the winter season the frost renders the rails very brittle, so that they break under a passing train. In consequence of this liability to danger, a corps of trackmen are so placed as to walk over and examine every mile of the northern roads, in extreme weather, after the passing of each train. Those trackmen are supplied with the ordinary tools for repairing any slight break, and also with a lantern to signify danger when necessary to any incoming train. In the instance to which we refer, the trackman had discovered a serious break in a rail just beside a steep embankment and viaduct, one of the most dangerous spots on the route. In his efforts to repair the danger, by some means his lantern became extinguished. Here was an unfortunate plight. In that sparsely inhabited region there was neither house nor shelter where he could renew the light. His matches he exhausted in vain endeavor to ignite the wick in so fierce a storm. Besides, as the man well reasoned, "the engineer, I knew, could not see my lantern, if it were lighted, three rods off in such a night." The Irishman was puzzled; the lightning express was nearly due; if it struck that defective rail the train would surely be wrecked!

What was to be done? A sudden inspiration struck him. He started and ran like a deer nearly half a mile up the track toward the on-coming train. Already he heard the rumble of its approach as he placed himself on a slight elevation on the side of the track. On came the train; he could see her signal light, though the engineer could neither see nor have heard him—on, on, thirty miles an hour, toward destruction. The Irishman braced himself, and, with a swift but careful throw of his unlighted lantern, he cast it straight into the engineer's face.

"Bedad! It was the only thing I could do," said the honest fellow, as he gratefully pocketed a purse of fifty dollars made up by the passengers.

We crept carefully on to the dangerous spot, where a detention of twenty minutes served to mend the track sufficiently to permit the passage of the train, and we once more dashed ahead in the darkness; but I shall never forget that experience upon the lightning express.

A SUPPOSITIOUS CASE.

One of our lawyers, Mr. Simms, had a visit recently from a man named Buddy. Mr. Buddy entered the office upon crutches, and his face was covered with contusions, so that he looked as if he had emerged from a terrific conflict with an antagonist who had won a complete victory.

Placing his crutches against the table and seating himself very carefully in the chair, Mr. Buddy said:

"Mr. Simms, I just dropped in to see you to git a little advice on a point of law in which I'm interested, and I'd be much obleeged if you'd tell me exactly what my rights in the matter are. I'll put it this way: S'pose'n you were to marry a widder, under the idea that she was an angel—that she was so sweet that a barrel of sugar was mere bitterness alongside of her; and s'pose'n after you were consolidated with her you were to find out that she had a temper like a she wild-cat, and an unconquerable custom of bunging you over the head with skillets or most anything that came handy, so that you didn't know what minute she'd get her mad up and skeer you pretty near to death.

"Now, s'pose'n this widder and you were to disagree about a little matter of chewing terbacker in the house and trying to spit in the stove, and she was to up and tell you—in your own house, mind you—that if you kep' aiming at that stove

and missing it she'd warm you up with a broom handle or the like; and you were to say that you'd chew where you'd 'a' mind to, and that while it was a free country you'd hit the stove or miss it jus' as you pleased.

"And s'pose'n one word brought on another until she got on a terrible rampage, and came at you and tried to snatch out your hair; while you grabbed her by the wrists and held her so she couldn't. And then s'pose'n while you were rassling with her you was to get the best of it so's she couldn't do anything but have the hysterics and scream, and you all the time afraid to let go lest she'd hustle you out through the winder.

"Now, s'pose'n that widder had a dog which belonged to her first husband, and would rather bite you than not, and all of a sudden she was to holler for that dog, and he was to come bouncing into the room, and seeing the widder's situation, was to take hold of a mouthful of your right leg, and shake it as though he was going to bite it loose before he left; and the widder all the time sicking him on and encouraging him to help himself without any regard for your feelings. And s'pose'n when you left go of her to tackle the dog she should bang you with the scrubbing brush until you looked as if you'd been ground up in a bark mill, and then wouldn't call off the dog until you hollered enough.

"S'posen'n all this, what I want to know is, can't you sue that widder for assault and battery, and get an injunction on that dog? That's what I came to see you about, whether you've got to stand having your leg chewed up and your head smashed with a scrubbing brush, or whether this great and free government's going to protect its defenseless citizens. I want to know how it is."

Mr. Simms looked very solemn for a moment, as if contemplating the problem carefully, and then he said:

"I don't really see that the law can do anything in such a case, Mr. Buddy. If the man married the widow he became part owner of the dog, and it was, therefore, in fact, his own dog that assaulted him. Besides that, as a man and his wife are one flesh, the widow had a partnership interest in the man's leg, and when she set the dog upon it she was really encouraging the animal to mutilate her own property. No action can lie against a person who induces her own dog to bite her own leg, nor will the law give her redress if she batters her own head with her own hands, for the wife who strikes her husband really strikes herself."

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed Mr. Buddy, in a blaze of indignation, "that that is the law of this land, of this very country where our forefathers bled for liberty! You don't actually mean to tell me that a red-headed widder, with a liver-colored dog, can actually make that dog gnaw a man's leg into sausage meat, while she trounces him with a club, and that he can't chuck her into jail for it; that he's got to stand up and take it?"

"I'm afraid he has," said Sims with a sad smile.

"Well, then," said Buddy, rising and taking his crutches; "that just lets me out as far as this idiotic land is concerned. I'm going to quit. If widders are to be allowed to carry on as if men had no rights, I'll emigrate and hunt up some country where enlightened civilization don't allow widders to reign. Let's see, it's India, isn't it, where they kill the widder when her first husband dies? Well, that's where I'm going. I'm going by the first boat. If I stay here I'll be dead in a month, and so chewed up that they'll have to bury me in pieces. Good morning."

And Mr. Buddy hobbled away disconsolate.

WHAT PUNISHMENT BY THE KNOUT MEANS.

We read of crimes and cruelties perpetrated in days long, long gone by, and, with a pitying sigh for the wretched sufferers, we thank Heaven that the blessed light of civilization illuminates the nineteenth century. We do not realize that a government, so-called Chirstian, even to this day, can wantonly cause such heart-rending sufferings as Russia metes out to Poland.

To be exempt from corporal chastisement is one of the privileges of a Russian nobleman; yet this does not prevent the torture being applied to Polish political prisoners even when they are of noble blood.

The subject, albeit a sad one, is not without a certain interest, particularly when we recall the memory of brave men and braver women who have yielded up a weary life while undergoing this, the most cruel of tortures—the knout.

The knout is a strip of hide, a thing which is steeped in some preparation, and strongly glazed, as it were, with metal filings. By this process it becomes both heavy and excessively hard; but before it hardens care is taken to double down the edges, which are left thin, and in this way a groove runs the length of the thong.

The upper part winds around the hand of the executioner; to the other end a small iron hook is fastened. Falling upon the bare back of the sufferer, the knout comes down on its concave side, of which the edges cut like a knife. The thong thus lies in the flesh.

The executioner does not lift it up, but draws it toward him horizontally, so that the hook tears off long strips. If the executioner has not been bribed, the victim loses consciousness after the third stroke, and sometimes dies under the fifth.

The scaffold is an inclined plane, to which the man is tied with his back uncovered. The head and feet are firmly fastened, and the hands, which are knotted together, go round below the plank, any movement of the body becoming impossible.

After receiving the prescribed number of strokes, the poor wretch is untied, and, on his knees, undergoes the cruel punishment of being marked. The letters "Vor"—meaning thief or malefactor—are printed in sharp, pointed letters on a stamp, which the executioner drives into the forehead, and into both cheeks, and, while the blood runs, a black mixture, of which gunpowder is an ingredient, is rubbed into the wounds: they heal, but the bluish scar remains for life.

TALLEYRAND'S NEUTRALITY.

A Berlin periodical cites an answer of Talleyrand to an eminent Paris banker, with whom he was on friendly terms. When a report reached Paris that King George III., of England, had died, the man of money called upon the statesman to get the truth out of him. He put the question plainly.

"Is the report true?"

"So far as I know," answered Talleyrand, "there are two reports from England. The one says that the king is dead; the other says that the king is alive. I, for my own part, believe neither the one nor the other. But I hope that you will regard this friendly information as strictly confidential."

HOW THE FIRE WAS PUT OUT.

"Accidents?" said the old sea captain. "No, we never have any to speak of on this line. Why, one trip, about a year ago, the ship caught fire down in the hold, and we never discovered it until we got into port and began to unload."

"That's strange. What put the fire out?"

"Why, it burned down through to the sea and the water put it out. Couldn't burn the water, you know."

And the captain walked away smiling, while the interlocutor was so astonished that he never thought to ask why the ship did not sink.

A CHANCE FOR BUSINESS.

A little boy entered a surgery the other day. On his catching sight of the doctor, he whispered quietly in his ear:

"Please, sir, mother wants to know is measles catching?"

"Tell your mother, of course they are," replied the doctor.

The boy, not being satisfied with this, exclaimed:

"Please, sir, mother wants to know what you will give her to spread 'em about the village. My sister's got 'em awful."

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